

THE WONDERS OF THE KINGDOM

# THE WONDERS OF THE KINGDOM

*A STUDY OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS*

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BY

G. R. H. SHAFTO

AUTHOR OF

"THE STORIES OF THE KINGDOM," "THE SCHOOL OF JESUS," ETC.



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## PREFACE

IF this book were addressed to the general public its most fitting preface would be an abject apology. It does not profess to "explain" or account for the miracles; it is not even a defence of the faith. It is simply an attempt to marshal the facts, to see the stories themselves as sincerely as possible, and to state such considerations as may be of service to fellow-students. To write on such a subject for those who only want ready-made conclusions seems scarcely worth while. Consequently it is addressed only to those who, like the writer, are so interested in Jesus that anything which might help to show any aspect of His life and work more clearly is welcome. If it does this in ever so small a degree for anyone it will have been well worth my while.

Should it seem that some matters are dealt with in a manner that precludes discussion my ability and not my intention is to blame. Perhaps the ends of common study are not altogether ill served if at times the writer's personal bias shows through. That it should appear at times is almost inevitable, but I hope it has not been stated with undue emphasis. I have tried to write as one of the jury to whom the facts are submitted, hoping that the fellowship of others may help to a true verdict,



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rather than as a barrister to whom a brief for prosecution or defence has been entrusted

I need not apologize to such readers for not writing down to the mental inertia to which we are all liable; and they will forgive more readily than others the many faults of style and matter of which I am only too conscious. The assumption that the reader is an interested person makes it unnecessary to seek excuse for some things at which a literary critic might properly take umbrage. It is, for instance, taken for granted that if my work is read at all it will be read in conjunction with the New Testament narratives, and frequently and severely cross-examined in their light. When my quotations of the Gospel stories vary from the words of the Authorized and Revised versions it is because the original text conveys the very words spoken or things done more literally than these standard translations suggest. I would like to disclaim most emphatically any idea that such paraphrases are "improvements" from a literary point of view; they are intended merely as explanatory. Previous experience, however, makes me fairly certain that I shall be told, "more in sorrow than in anger," that such colloquial renderings grate upon the literary sensitiveness of the discerning; one hates to inflict such pain, but it is necessary to face the fact that much in our original documents is not literary but colloquial.

As my pages bear witness, I have thankfully availed myself of the work of others in the same field—I trust always with due acknowledgment. Had I seen it before these pages were practically complete I



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should have been tempted to quote from *Miracles and the New Psychology*, by E. R. Micklem, in connection with many of the stories of healing. The reader who is interested in modern therapeutics will find in Mr. Micklem's essay detailed accounts of several cases, many of them from the Seale Hayne Neurological Studies, including remarkably apt parallels to some of the types of disorder narrated in the Gospels.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Revs. F. A. Cockin and Hugh Martin for many helpful counsels embodied in these pages.

G. R. H. SHAFTO

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## THE ACTS OF JESUS

OUR knowledge of the facts of the earthly life of Jesus Christ is derived from memoirs compiled by early followers of His. These memoirs, of course, are written from the standpoint of His contemporaries and conditioned by the outlook, general knowledge, and fundamental ideas of their time. Since they were written great changes have taken place in all these conditions, and we need to be continually on our guard lest we read into the records conceptions or assumptions that are entirely alien to the minds of the original writers. They relate some of the acts of Jesus at length but pass over many others, summarizing periods of the ministry in a sentence or so. The character of the incidents narrated, and of these summaries, suggests one or two preliminary considerations that should be kept before our minds.

The first is that a large proportion of the acts of Jesus which are recounted in any detail are those to which the term "miracle" has been applied. In its original and simple meaning of an occurrence which is "a cause for wonder or astonishment"

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the word may be quite appropriately used to describe them, for the records themselves frequently and freely remark upon the very general astonishment aroused by His deeds. These miracles are an integral part of the memoirs and cannot by any possibility be regarded as additions or embroideries with which His disciples sought to enhance the value or significance of the story.

“The miraculous element in the gospels is no mere excrescence or external adjunct easily separated from the body of the history, but an essential portion of it, closely woven into the fabric, vitally connected with the organism. Words and works are so united that the one divorced from the other would in many instances become unintelligible.” (A. B. Bruce, *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 115.)

“We cannot construct a consistent picture of the life of Jesus Christ from the Gospels, if we do not take account of His miraculous powers, however those ‘miraculous’ powers are to be explained. His miracles are not like the miracles in Livy or in the history of many of the mediæval saints, detached pieces that do not disturb the history, which goes very well without them; but the whole history is grounded in them and presupposes them. Without making any assumption as to the date and manner of composition of the Synoptic Gospels, this fact stands out. We cannot contrive any theory by which we may entirely eliminate the miraculous, and yet save the historicity, in any intelligible sense, of those wonderful narratives. It is vain to say, as some have done, that possibly the original nucleus of the Gospels contained no miraculous stories . . . We cannot by any artifice reach a primitive gospel which is not to a greater or less extent a miracle gospel, and so we cannot treat off-hand the Gospel history in the matter of rejecting miracles as we would treat the *Acta Sanctorum*.” (J. H. Bernard, *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. iii., pp. 389-90.)

“Miracles play so important a part in Christ’s scheme, that any theory which would represent them as due entirely



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to the imagination of His followers or of a later age, destroys the credibility of the documents not partially but wholly, and leaves Christ a personage as mythical as Hercules." (J. R. Seeley, *Ecce Homo*, p. 41.)

These considered statements make the position clear. It is not possible to separate the acts from the sayings of Jesus, for the works as much as the words are of the essence of His teaching. The Rev. T. H. Wright has shown that the result of any attempt to omit the miraculous element from the gospels is that

"the very warp and woof of the fabric is destroyed." (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ii. 189a.)

The result of such an excision in the first three chapters of Mark's Gospel—an experiment which the reader may well try for himself—is that

"the whole narrative is rendered colourless and dislocated." (*Ibid.*)

The fourth Gospel is more sparing in its references to the miraculous, but that is because the writer has deliberately selected seven "signs" as specially illustrative of his own purpose, which is to give an interpretation of the history of Jesus whereby men might believe in Him as the Son of God and, believing, might have life. The spirit in which his record is conceived influences his whole presentation, and we have to recognize that he handles his material far more freely, with direct reference to his main purpose, than do the earlier and more simply constructed records of the Synoptists. But here also the whole atmosphere is an atmosphere of

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miracle. On this we shall have more to say in connection with some of the accounts themselves (see, *e. g.*, p. 104).

When we examine the stories of the miracles we shall expect to find that their presentation is inevitably governed by the mental equipment of the writers or narrators just as their expression is governed by their vocabulary and range of ideas. The beliefs of their time, their conception of the universe and their thought of God, must inevitably be reflected in the way they express what they have seen and heard.<sup>1</sup> They were men to whom our science and its categories were utterly unknown, men whose ideas of the material universe would seem to us inadequate and even grotesque at times. We must recognize that their way of looking at things is essentially Oriental and that it is not always easy for us to look through their eyes at the scenes they describe; we must also recognize the sincerity of Luke's brief preface to his Gospel and understand that the chroniclers were not always identical with the eye-witnesses whose narratives they have recorded.

He "went about doing good" is their comprehensive description of the activities of Jesus (Acts 10. 38). He is not doing wonders all the time, but He is doing good all the time. The Gospel silences leave us free to assume that the greater part of His earthly life was simple, human living, that He went about as a man—a workman and a breadwinner—holding the creed of the Divine Fatherhood and human brotherhood as a definite and concrete

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 23.



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reality, and exemplifying it in personal activity and service.

Here and there in the Gospels are incidents which reveal the Master's character without any suggestion of departure from recognized and normal human action. We see Him in the Temple passionately requiring sincerity and insisting that the hypocrisy which consecrates a place to Divine communion and then uses it as a market for selfish gain shall not be tolerated. We see Him in His "divine, disreputable friendships" with society's outcasts proclaiming His inextinguishable faith in God's Fatherhood for all; in His essential chivalry when confronted with a woman branded by the exposure of her sin; in His readiness to live the life of service which He preaches when He makes His own the duty of the meanest house-slave and washes the feet of His comrades before the Last Supper. All such incidents give us an insight into our Lord's character and motives.

But there remains the greater number of His recorded activities. "Wonders," "powers" and "signs" are the words by which the chroniclers characterize them. When they are spoken of as "miracles" in these pages the term is not used in any theological sense, or, at least, not in any narrowly theological temper; for it is becoming increasingly clear that their purpose was not evidential but illustrative: they are declarations in deed to match His words, manifestations of God's will and purpose towards man. To an impartial judgment the evidential value of miracles will depend not so much on their incongruity with the known

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order of nature but upon their perfect congruity with the character and aims of Him to Whom they are ascribed.

Let us consider for a moment our Lord's own declared attitude towards these "mighty works." The phrase itself comes from His own lips. It is found in Matt. 11. 21-24, where He claims to be judged not by the words He has spoken but by the deeds He has done in Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. He felt that these works of mercy spoke louder than any words; and His pronouncement is not so much that of a Judge passing sentence as the sad conviction that a spiritual insensibility which remains unmoved by such proofs of compassion, power and love can only end in misery and woe; in a word, that hardness of heart is humanity's ultimate sin.

Earlier in the same chapter (Matt. 11. 2-6; cf. Lk. 7. 18-35) Jesus' reply to the emissaries of the imprisoned Baptist is recorded. John had heard in his prison of the acts of Jesus and was disturbed by their character; to remove afflictions was not his idea of the way to make men repent or to bring in God's reign. Probably he considered affliction a necessary discipline of God for sinful men, and these acts of physical healing would seem to him altogether beside the mark—a kind of moral trifling—and not matters for the attention of the Lord's Anointed. Jesus, however, most pointedly claims to have His ministry and character judged by such deeds. "In that hour he cured many . . . and said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard" (Lk. 7. 21, 22). Jesus was not



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seeking, as John considered He should do—and as many devout men in later ages have striven to prove He was doing—to present His credentials, but to reveal Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus wanted men to know that God cared for them. Doing things was a way of showing that this was so; He declared a Father who cared for His children and His deeds were evidences in support; not simply exhibitions of power, but of the truth about God and the purpose of God. We think of them as extraordinary because we cannot do them. Apparently Christ did not regard them as extraordinary at all.

What was the essential character of these deeds? That they were supernatural? a direct interference with the ordinary course of nature whereby it was proved that their doer was greater than nature? Then why were they refused to those who sought such signs (Mk. 8. 11; Lk. 11. 29)? If they exemplify the line of the Psalmist which says, "Thou hast put all things under his feet," the commissions to the Twelve and to the Seventy, to say nothing of the evidence of the Old Testament and of the Book of the Acts, show that its application is general and not individual. The blunt statement in Matt. 12. 27 that other men wrought cures and the evidence just referred to preclude any

<sup>1</sup> "They (the miracles) are so essentially a part of the character depicted in the Gospels that without them that character would entirely disappear. They flow naturally from a Person, Who, despite His obvious humanity, impresses us as being at home in two worlds. We cannot separate the wonderful life, or the wonderful teaching, from the wonderful works." (J. R. Illingworth, *The Gospel Miracles*.)

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such argument, and we must seek a more satisfactory explanation.

The second preliminary consideration concerning the doings of Jesus, which must be a factor in all our conclusions concerning them, is that from time to time the evangelists give general summaries of our Lord's activities. These have sometimes been dismissed as merely editorial—the connecting-links, so to speak, supplied by the chronicler in order to weave his incidents and paragraphs into something like narrative. This is an entirely superficial view of their purpose; but we are, for the moment, concerned with their nature rather than their purpose, and the thing to be observed is that they are invariably dominated by the “miraculous” element. Here is a typical one:—

“And when they were come out of the boat, straightway the people knew him, and ran round about that whole region, and began to carry about on their beds those that were sick, where they heard that he was. And wheresoever he entered, into villages, or into cities, or into the country, they laid the sick in the market-places, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.” (Mk. 6. 54-56; cf. Matt. 14. 34-36.)

Other passages which speak in similar general terms of His ministry are Mk. 1. 32-34, Matt. 8. 16, 17, Lk. 4. 40, 41; Mk. 1. 39, Matt. 4. 23; Mk. 3. 7-12, Matt. 4. 24, 25; Matt. 12. 15-21, Lk. 6. 17-19; Lk. 7. 18-23; Mk. 6. 1-6, Matt. 13. 53-58; Matt. 9. 35; Matt. 14. 13 f., Lk. 9. 10 f.; Matt. 15. 29-31; Matt. 19. 1, 2; Matt. 21. 14; Jn. 2. 23. No perusal of these passages can fail to



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leave the conviction that the general impression made by our Lord as He "went about doing good" was such that the special narratives of mighty works are merely particular instances of the general nature of His acts; and that those general activities of His were such as support the credibility of the special examples.

Testimony to this is given from all quarters. There are some forty-two of these indirect references to miraculous action on the part of Jesus in the four Gospels; many of these are, of course, parallel accounts; but the most thorough-going attempts to reduce the Gospel story to its most primitive form still leave an inextricable strand of "miracle" running through it. It is suggested by the narratives that there were limitations to His use of miraculous power; that Jesus exercised a self-imposed restraint in its employment; and that He not infrequently enjoined silence concerning it upon those who witnessed and those who benefited by its manifestation. All such suggestions if they are historical lend credibility to the accounts; if not, no theory of delusion or invention can explain them naturally. Our Lord's opponents at one time request such signs; at another they ascribe the signs He did to Satanic agency. The populace, the priests, the disciples, the evangelists, Christ Himself—all refer to the miracle-working activities associated with His Person.

Dr. Sanday says, "The evidence for all these miracles"—he is speaking of those recorded in the Gospels—"generally speaking is strong. The evidence for all the different classes is equally strong.

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The historian who tries to construct a reasoned picture of Christ finds that he cannot dispense with miracles." And Dr. Forrest on the same subject points out that "as regards mere testimony we have more evidence for His miracles than for many of His sayings."

The type of mind which can eliminate the miraculous from the evangelistic testimony can eliminate anything! The plain fact is that the chroniclers tell us how "Jesus, a man mighty in word *and in deed*," has revealed to them the way to faith by His words and deeds; and this way they find to be communicable to others when they bear their witness as to His life; word and deed going together and interpreting each other.



## THE PURPOSE OF THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

CAN we first establish clearly in our own minds the purpose of the evangelists in recording the miracles, that we may be in a position to test the usefulness of their narratives for that purpose? It is not quite fair to complain that an article of furniture designed to serve the double purpose of a chair and of steps for one's library is not so comfortable as an arm-chair; the question is whether it reasonably fulfils the functions claimed for it. So also with these records. If the evangelists propose to tell us how Jesus wrought His miracles and fail to make that clear, then their stories are inadequate and unsatisfactory. But do they ever, even in their own minds, propose anything of the sort? John says he wrote his evangel, signs and all, "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20. 31); possibly the opening words of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach," make clear the instinctive, if undefined, intention of the earliest evangelists of Christianity. Their concern is the portrayal of their Master's character and they recognized that "deeds, not words," are the basis of all final decisions as to character and worth; that mankind will judge the sincerity of a man's religion not by his profession



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but by his performance, and that character is supremely revealed in action.

We must, then, look at the records of the acts of Jesus realizing that the abiding value of these acts depends upon their motive, for the motive alone can fully reveal the character, power, and personality of the doer. How they were done is valuable as knowledge, but why they were done is supremely important. The earliest Gospel of them all is a series of sketches—"The Cartoons of Mark," they have been called—of Christ in action, and its narratives were fundamental to the synoptic portrait of Jesus. We may reasonably expect, then, to find in His *actions* a fairly complete unfolding of His character and aims: and it may be that we shall find that such things as He did are only to be achieved under like conditions of character and motive in the doer. Be that as it may it would seem evident that we shall miss something essential in the value of these stories if we lose sight of the supreme purpose of those who preserved them for us.

The four Gospels record some thirty-five incidents in the life of Jesus to which the word "miracle" has been applied. There is not sufficient information to enable us to arrange them in a strictly chronological order, and any attempt at classification leads to confusion rather than clearness. For instance, recognition of the importance of purpose has led some to attempt to classify them according to motive—the emotion which impelled Jesus to action, or the thought of ends to be attained which induced Him so to act. The only emotion explicitly noted by the evangelists is compassion.

## PURPOSE OF MIRACLES OF JESUS

This is spoken of in some five cases which will bring together matters so diverse as the cleansing of a leper and the multiplication of a food-supply, and will leave a complicated sub-grouping for the second class for which the curious reader may be referred to the chapter on Our Lord's Use of Signs in *Pastor Pastorum* (Latham). Briefly, the ends to be attained may be stated as (a) to reveal Himself, (b) to create belief, and (c) to manifest the glory of God. It is doubtful whether such a grouping is of much practical help towards clearing one's thought about the miracles as a whole.

The Rev. T. H. Wright (see his article on Miracle, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*) has suggested eight categories—(1) Healing Bodily Ailments, (2) Healing Nervous Diseases, (3) Healing Nervous and Psychical Disorders, (4) Manifestations of Power in His own Nature (Walking on the Water), (5) Manifestations of Power in Nature and the Organic World (the Draughts of Fishes and the Stater in the Fish's Mouth), (6) Manifestations of Power upon the Organic World (Water Become Wine, Multiplied Loaves, Withering of the Figtree), (7) Manifestations of Power upon the Inorganic World (Stilling the Storm), (8) Raising the Dead.

Human personality is so complicated a matter that (1), (2) and (3) continually impinge on one another, and are not easily to be separated from (8); (4), (6) and (7), too, are very closely interwoven. Mr. Wright's fifth class includes three happenings. Two are unexpected Draughts of Fish (Lk. 5. 1-11; Jn. 21. 6), of which Archbishop Trench said they differ from Christ's other miracles in that they are



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not comings in of a new power into the region of nature but coincidences divinely brought about between the words of Christ and the facts of the natural world. We have not sufficient information as to these incidents to enable us to achieve any definite conclusion; it is open to anyone to speculate as to the keenness of the intuitions of Jesus, or the nature of His knowledge, or the problems of the Divine government of the world of nature. But in any case there is no act on Christ's part, and such speculation scarcely falls within the scope of what we have proposed for our study. The same is also true of the third happening—the Stater in the Fish's Mouth. But this is more probably the vivid form of an instruction given to Peter, who has committed them both to a certain payment without consulting his Master's wishes, to go and earn the amount by the exercise of his old vocation—that the tax was to be a tax on “earned income.”

The foundation-miracles of the Gospel, the virgin-birth and the resurrection, belong to the larger question of the Person of our Lord and are outside the scope of this consideration of His acts. The incarnation means, as Illingworth says, a new fact in human history; and the resurrection is an instance—a supreme instance—of the possibilities of this new factor. It contradicts our ordinary experience because it rises above that experience to a higher plane of existence. The accounts of the resurrection constitute, as Bishop Westcott said, “not a history, but a gospel,” and from that gospel grew the Church. Were we attempting to prove the possibility, not to say the probability, of the



## PURPOSE OF MIRACLES OF JESUS

occurrence of the miracles with which Jesus is credited, argument might well be based upon these great themes ; but we are merely proposing to study the records of those acts of His, to understand them—not merely about them—as far as is possible, and to learn their practical bearing upon the life and faith of those who seek to follow Jesus as Lord.

Some of these paragraphs disclose the fact that there is no unanimous agreement as to what happenings are to be included in a list of the Gospel miracles and may explain why it is wiser not to confuse the issues, by confining our studies to the clearly-recorded acts of Jesus. Of these we can say at once that the greater part of these acts have to do with humanity's health and well-being and are in this way directly concerned with Jesus' supreme axiom, that God's Fatherhood is real and actual : such a Fatherhood as finds in the health and happiness of His children matter of moment and importance.

Five incidents alone do not belong to this large class of works of healing in which most of the works of Jesus may be included ; they are the water becoming wine, the feeding of the multitude, the stilling of the tempest, the walking on the lake, and the withering of the fig-tree. These are sometimes described as "nature" or "cosmic" miracles, because they seem to require some definite supersession of well-known ascertained laws of nature. As this is a question of some importance to the modern mind it may be helpful if we begin with this small group of incidents and, after trying to see exactly what we are told about them, consider what this relation to "natural law" may be.

## THE WATER BECOME WINE

(Jn. 2. 1-11)

THE statement, "This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee," is usually taken as meaning that the sign at the marriage-feast was Jesus' first miracle; that no act of His prior to this possessed any extraordinary significance. "Beginning," however, may be associated in the writer's mind with the special word "sign" which he applies to his seven selected examples. If so, John is explicitly referring to this as the event which was the first to convey to the disciples some sense of the special significance of His acts which had not been aroused by any deeds of healing or of beneficence that had preceded it. A similar particularity of phrase is used in Jn. 4. 54 of a second sign at Cana, which supports the idea that the reference is not purely chronological; this we shall consider in due course (see p. 138).

The possibility that this incident is an example of the allegorizing method, in which some suppose John indulged freely, has been fairly fully exploited. In the interest of a purely mystic significance, as opposed to historic accuracy, it has been pointed out that the Odes of Solomon give evidence of the use of "bridegroom," "wine," "water," "servants," "well," "to become inebriated," as spiritual



## THE WATER BECOME WINE

metaphors in literature that was probably current in our Lord's day. The comment, "but the servants which had drawn the water knew" (v. 9), might be an allusion to the Apostles and so significant for an allegorical interpretation of the story: even the butler's joke in v. 10 has been quoted as a paraphrase of, "I drank and was inebriated with the living water" (Odes of Solomon, 11. 7.)

But no merely allegorical explanation can satisfactorily account for the historical and personal allusions which are part of the essential fabric of the narrative. There are precise details of time, place and persons, which are quite unaccountable in a purely symbolic presentation of spiritual truth concerning the joy of life, the transforming influence of Christ's presence, and so on. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that "the third day" is a mystic phrase and that "marriage" may be used as "signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his Church," there are many essential points in the story quite untouched. The presence of our Lord's mother—John never mentions her by name—and her connexion with the family whose feast it is (v. 5); the somewhat cryptic conversation between her and Jesus; the fact that our Lord and His disciples were among the invited guests; the definiteness of His instructions and the completeness with which they were carried out; the specific statement that the person responsible for the replenishment of the table "tasted the water now become wine"; his surprise expressed in homely language, suggestive of popular tradition rather than of mystical writing; these form a collection of



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details that are mostly superfluous from a symbolic point of view but of significance if the record is, as on the face of it it professes to be, the precise reminiscence of one who was present and afterwards recalled his own vivid memories of a day long past. The rather vulgar joke of the man in charge of the festivities about serving inferior liquor to intoxicated men (v. 10, literally, "when they are drunk") scarcely seems to serve any high spiritual purpose, while it does suggest a remembrance of actual words spoken upon a definite occasion.

"Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (v. 4) gives a needlessly harsh turn to a sentence which runs, literally, "What to me and thee?" This may be a simple colloquialism for "Never mind." Perhaps Mary's remark to Jesus was a suggestion that as the wine had run short their party might ease the situation by leaving and so give a general signal for the break-up of the festivities. If so, our Lord's reply—"Mine hour is not yet come"—is simply "I am not yet ready to go." This would dispose of the difficulties about the "hour" and of anything that savours of a rebuke administered to His mother. Against this interpretation must be set the fact that for John this phrase about the "hour" is one of great significance. It recurs again and again in his Gospel and becomes one of his key-phrases. Compare 7. 30, 8. 20, 12. 27, 13. 1, 17. 1. Taking these passages together they exhibit the use of the phrase to mark the writer's sense of a Divine sequence in the life of lives. Yet even so, its first occurrence is here in a homely setting; perhaps its colloquial use in those early days of

## THE WATER BECOME WINE

fellowship was treasured by John's retentive memory for "little, unrecorded" words and sayings. We see how intimate occasions, scarce considered important enough for perpetuation in writing by others, remained in John's heart, and this little phrase may have sounded there as a refrain which grew in significance for the life-story as he sought to set it forth.

How water can become wine in an instant of time we cannot tell. It is, of course, open to anyone to point out that sun, soil and vine co-operate to produce the grape-juice from the water supplies received by the plant, and that by after-treatment this ferments so that the rain and dew eventually become wine; the miracle being simply an acceleration of natural processes and not an abrogation of them. There are plenty of examples to show that nature's processes do vary in rate over a very wide range of time: the mushroom that reaches maturity and passes to decay within a few hours and the oak that takes centuries to perform the same cycle afford a simple contrast well within the limits of that range. But for such a happening as that which is recorded, the law that works clearly through an observable process of growth occasioned by an orderly succession of natural events would have to be rescinded, or have to give way for the time; and this is not very different from cancelling the order of nature. Nature, of course, is always at God's disposal, and we know really very little about the way in which He attains His ends through it.

While the evangelist furnishes no hint as to how it was done he gives two reasons why. First he



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says that our Lord "manifested his glory." Now "glory" is properly an attribute of God alone; so that this is another way of saying that Christ revealed God to His disciples by His action on this occasion. He does not of necessity imply that they immediately recognized this, but he does say that by reason of this experience they came to see more clearly what was the true Divine glory: they came to know God as taking a fatherly interest in the actual life and simple festivities of His children; to know Him as a Father who is not infinitely removed and Olympian in His attitude but wonderfully near and homely in His relations, sharing in and increasing human joy. It is the exact reverse of the picture presented by orthodox religion of the day which mistook the source as well as the nature of glory (see Jn. 5. 44).

This is emphasized still more by John's second reason for the miracle: because of it, "his disciples believed on him." Men cannot believe, in any effectual sense, when the nature of the Divine glory is misunderstood and interpreted in terms of awe instead of fellowship; but when the real glory of God is seen in the love that shares our lot and enters into human experiences, faith becomes possible; it is called forth, strengthened, increased. From first to last John uses "faith" as a name for something men *do*. His favourite preposition gives faith a quality of movement ("believed *on*"); it passes from one position to another, and its object is always Christ; always a Person, not a statement or a creed. The noun "faith" is never used in John's Gospel, but his continual use of the verb "to



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believe" makes his whole Gospel a Christian presentation of faith, always as an act: of faith as merely a condition of mind he has nothing to say. Faith to him is not an antithesis to reason, which is a mental process: the antithesis is between faith as an act and sight, which is also an act: "Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed" (Jn. 20. 29). Such a faith is really an adjustment of one's personality to Jesus, an identification of self with Him and, through Him, with God.

We must not forget that the evangelist is recalling this experience in the light of after events. Probably at the time the disciples saw the power and authority implied in what happened; afterwards they came to see something greater. If we do not find anything greater we shall miss the lesson they did finally learn. We are in danger of discovering something that strikes us as incongruous: the incident may not seem to us to fit in with the refusal to make bread of the wilderness stones: why no miracle when there was a need, yet a miracle when there is no adequately serious need to be met? Indeed, Strauss characterized the incident as a miracle of mere luxury and uselessness. Dean Paget saw in it a miracle of courtesy and considered that furnished a sufficient motive for its remembrance as a manifestation of glory. Courtesy that is unerring in its sympathy with the self-respect of others, that would cover up the humiliation of rustic feast-givers whose provision was not equal to the demands upon it, is not an easy virtue; it requires a miracle at times. But to the evangelist the supreme purpose which he had in view in his inclusion of this among

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his deliberately selected signs was : " that ye may believe." Perhaps the note of unwillingness in our Lord's word to His mother, " Mine hour is not yet come," has a deeper significance than His intention to stay yet a while longer ; perhaps it finds an echo in His word concerning the second sign at Cana—" except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe."

Our Lord's works are visible emblems of what He is ; and the glory manifested at Cana is the glory of the Son of Man who came, " eating and drinking," who claims a concern in all human interests, who shares the sorrow of Bethany and, no less, the joy of Cana.



## STILLING THE STORM

(Matt. 8. 23-27 ; Mk. 4. 35-41 ; Lk. 8. 22-25)

IN Mark this event is placed at the beginning of a section where four stories of miracles illustrate the theme of simple faith in God, displaying such faith as triumphant over dangers, demons, disease and death.

All three evangelists are at one in their main outline of the miracle and in the words used to describe it : they all emphasize the contrast between the confidence of Jesus and the fearfulness of the disciples. Luke's account follows Mark fairly closely, his variations being purely literary : Matthew condenses, representing the disciples as invoking their Master's aid rather than as expostulating with Him for His indifference, and giving the disciples credit for a little faith.

Mark's story preserves for us more perfectly the rustic outlook and the ideas current among the simple folk with whom our Lord lived. Wind and sea are spoken of as persons ; and this is not merely metaphor : it is in harmony with their Oriental outlook, which was not scientific but religious. We must go to the Psalms to get the point of view—"the sea is his, and he made it" ; "stormy wind, fulfilling his word" ; "who maketh the winds his messengers." Wind and sea, that is, were ranked



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among the "powers"; they obeyed God directly, and only God. Hence the awestruck question, "What manner of man is this?"

The lake of Gennesaret lies one hundred feet below sea-level: the high hills on the eastern side are broken here and there by deep ravines which act as funnels for the wind awakened by the rapid drop of temperature at sunset. Sudden squalls of great intensity, dying away as suddenly and as unexpectedly as they arise, are of frequent occurrence. Such a gale had sprung up on an evening when Jesus had given the word to cross "to the other side"—from Capernaum to Gerasa or Gadara (see p. 62).

Matthew says that Jesus embarked, accompanied by His disciples: Mark says He went "even as he was," after the parable-telling; that is, without landing from the boat or making any preparations for the journey. He adds (and Luke follows him) that Jesus gave the order to cross: it is possible that the weatherwise sailors thought that the conditions presaged a storm and only undertook the crossing at His express desire, which may account for their remonstrant tone when they aroused Him (cf. v. 38).

During the voyage our Lord went to sleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. The wind was from the north-east and the boat was caught sideways by the squall, the waves beating in and threatening to swamp it. The panic-stricken men woke Him with remonstrance not unmingled with indignation (but Matthew and Luke omit this), "Teacher, are we to drown for all you care?"

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Rousing up immediately, Jesus "rebuked" the wind and said to the sea, "Down! Be quiet!" He gave commands to these natural forces, as to "demons," with instinctive authority. And wind and sea at once became quiet.

Turning to the disciples He said, "Why are you afraid?" Their abject, unreasoning fear of death was, in His eyes, the expression of a lack of faith. Surely they knew that they were as much the object of their heavenly Father's solicitude by sea as by land, in life or in death! It was not that He expected them to be confident that they would not sink or be drowned, for there was no ground for any such confidence. But He thought they might trust God and not be afraid. The lack of any real faith was at the root of their terror and that lack surprised Him (cf. "He marvelled at their unbelief," Mk. 6. 6).

The rebuke is softened somewhat in Matthew, who credits the disciples with a *little* faith, and in Luke, who reports the question as "Where is your faith?" But the disciples are not spared much in Mark! Here for the first time he describes them as afraid of Jesus; but it is an experience which grows upon them (see Mk. 6. 50; 9. 6; 9. 32; 10. 32; 16. 8): the tendency to awe seems to increase as they got to know Him better.

Perhaps the first question about the stilling of the storm which arises in our minds is "How could this be?" It is possible to see in the incident just a coincidence between the quickly-spent gale and the awakening of Jesus. Coincidence is called in rather frequently by some interpreters, and one feels



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its "long arm" must ache a little with so much to do. The question which the stilling aroused in the disciples' mind was "*Who* can this be?" To them the ever-present miracle was Jesus: and already their thoughts were vaguely equating Him with God, Whom winds and seas obey.

The purpose of the miracle may perhaps be seen in connection with the training of these men who are presently to face a world full of hostile powers. It was a revelation of their Master for them; and He was bringing home to them the thought of God as a Father Who knows about and cares for His children however desperate may be their circumstance. They saw Jesus as a man ever conscious of the presence of God; so one with God that their wills were identical. He spoke to them of God as "My Father," and added "your Father too." And as they learnt by such experiences as this to do His will and trust Him, they were really learning to live by faith. Their faith was being drawn out, and in the final result they learned to identify Christ with the very eternal God. It was faith in a living, present and inspiring Spirit Whose workings awoke in them a strong desire—"Lord, increase our faith: teach us to be as trustful and useful as Thou art." They were learning the lesson He came to impart. This experience was essentially connected with the growth of the disciples' faith in Christ; it was, perhaps, a lesson necessary for their acceptance of what we now know as the Christian religion.

## JESUS WALKS ON THE LAKE

(Matt. 14. 22-33 ; Mk. 6. 45-52 ; Jn. 6. 15-21)

THIS is a second story of a storm on the lake. It is an immediate sequel to the gathering in the wilderness, and apparently the "constraint" needed to send the disciples away was applied because they were infected with the general enthusiasm that would then and there have started an insurrection.

The account in Mark is associated with good history and bears unconscious testimony to itself as good history; there is a candid reference to apostolic dulness, and there are difficulties and obscurities in the narrative which would have been foreseen by an imaginative writer constructing an incident, but are taken for granted as understandable by one who is simply telling facts. John adds the information which enables us to reconstruct the situation more exactly; but still leaves us with an account whose honesty is quite compatible with inaccurate observation. His use of "immediately"—a favourite with Mark but not with John—certainly suggests they were nearer the shore than they realized.

It was at "second evening"—that is, between six p.m. and dark—that our Lord made the disciples embark and put off from the shore. Their instructions were to wait for Him until He had dismissed the crowd and spent some time in solitary communion. They were to sail from the plain of el-Batiyeh, where the gathering had been held,



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across the small bay to Bethsaida and wait there for Jesus: when He had joined them they would all proceed to Capernaum, across the larger bay that constitutes the northern end of the lake. Although it was the full moon just before the Passover it was a "dirty night," as sailors would say, with a clouded sky; John comments upon the unusual darkness. A gale from the east had blown them out across the lake and they tried to row back to keep their station till the Master should come. This explains the situation better than the usual interpretation of the narrative (of which a clear statement is given in Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ii. 591 f.). The wind continued strong and the men were exhausted by their long-sustained effort to hold the boat against it and get back to shore. About three a.m. Jesus came to them, walking on the water. They did not see Him—for they had their backs to Him as they rowed—until they realized there was a Form passing by the boat. This unexpected vision aroused all their superstitious instincts; for the moment, they were not disciples but sailor-men conscious of something most ill-omened; it was a wraith, a portent of imminent disaster, and a wail of terrified despair went up from the crew. Mark (v. 50) is careful to make it clear that it was not a delusion of one excited man; they all shared the vision and the dismay.

At once Jesus reassured them: "Courage! It is my real self.<sup>1</sup> Don't be afraid."

He entered the boat and the wind fell. Mark

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is not classical but colloquial; and its meaning is clearly this.

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speaks of the stunned bewilderment of the disciples ; says they had not drawn the true inference as to Christ's power over material things from the incident of the loaves. It is curiously significant that there is no comment as to the disciples' sentiments on the occasion of the feeding of the people.

Matthew gives a quite different picture of their attitude of worshipful praise when the Master entered the boat, but in his narrative it is separated from the account of their terror by the story of Peter's attempt to cross to Jesus. He follows Mark in saying that they crossed the lake and landed at Gennesaret. Probably with John we must correct to "Capernaum" and regard Gennesaret as their final mooring-place after calling at Capernaum. John's "straightway they were at the land" indicates that they were nearer the place than they had supposed, having made but little headway in their attempt to row back.

It has been suggested that this is a story which presents an unnecessary display of His power and is quite unlike Jesus : also that it involves a suspension of the law of gravity and must be ruled out as a needless violation of natural law. The latter point is pure assumption ; levitation cannot be declared to be scientifically impossible. Having found so many impossibilities to be possible within the last hundred years, we are, perhaps, less inclined to dogmatize as to the limitations of our sources of natural energy. So many ancient fancies have been laughed out of court only to return as modern facts that the word "impossible" is one of which wise men are sparing in their use. Levitation of human



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bodies is a very ancient, widespread, and persistent tradition of mankind.

The objection that such an occurrence was a needless display of His power assumes that it was within His power. Was it so unnecessary if the disciples could not make the shore after hours of effort and were spent with rowing? Jesus had promised to rejoin them and He kept His promise: it is unthinkable that He would fail to do so. His men were being trained for tasks in which they would need to rely utterly upon their Master's promised co-operation, they would have to do this "as seeing him who is invisible"; and they had to learn that in all work enjoined by Him undertaken without His bodily presence He was truly with them, as He promised to be. There was surely ample justification for a "display of power" under circumstances where their unaided obedience was inadequate for the completion of the programme laid down.

"Through deep waters I will be with thee." They were learning a faith which was a complete committal of oneself to another; for that Other never had been known to fail of His word whatever adverse circumstances might intervene to render its fulfilment unlikely. Even though they failed to keep exactly to their part of the contract, if there were no failure in sincere effort He must keep His word.

Dr. A. B. Bruce, writing of these two stories of the Storm-stilling and the Water-walking, observes:

"The object Jesus had in view in both cases was to guard against danger threatening the men with whom the fortunes of the kingdom were identified." (*The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 271.)

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There is one other consideration which must weigh with us in any attempt to appraise these stories aright. If Christ's was a unique personality—and there will be few to deny this—what may be proper to Him either in or out of "nature" will also be unique. "Never man spake like this man" has as its true consequence "never man wrought like this man." In any consistent character acts and words go together, confirming and completing each other.



## THE FEEDING OF THE MULTITUDE

(Matt. 14. 13-21; Mk. 6. 30-44; Lk. 9. 10-17;  
Jn. 6. 1-14)

ALL four evangelists record the feeding of five thousand people in a desert place; in the first three Gospels it stands in close connection with the murder of John the Baptist, Matthew and Luke distinctly implying that the retirement from publicity—which Mark also notes—was occasioned by the tidings and by the fact that Herod knew of the whereabouts of Jesus. It is not improbable that the Baptist's fate had something to do with the temper of the crowd, which John says was not far from actual revolt (cf. 6. 16). Luke in v. 10 places the incident at Bethsaida, but this hardly agrees with the implications of v. 12, where the disciples explain that they are in a desert place. John says it took place in Galilee, though in his Gospel it follows a discourse given at Jerusalem without any explanation of the change of scene; he makes it clear that it occurred in the moorlands. A probable place is the district near the site of Bethsaida Julias and near the supposed site of the Bethsaida on the lakeside, the plain now known as el-Batiyeh.

Mark says that the sight of the great crowd assembled moved Jesus to compassion and He taught them; Matthew says that His pity for the

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folk caused Him to heal their sick, and he transfers Mark's sentence with the quotation from Ezekiel about sheep not having a shepherd to another connection (see Matt. 9. 36). It has been said that Mark places this story in a similar category to many other miracles by the statement that it was caused by our Lord's compassionateness. Without questioning the probability of the motive, it is only just to observe that Mark actually says that this was the reason for Christ's *teaching* on this occasion, and Matthew finds in it the motive of His *healing* work; John's general statement in verses 2 and 3 seems to include both forms of ministry. None of the writers represent Jesus as saying, "I have compassion on this multitude and therefore I will feed them."

All evangelists agree that as the day drew to its close the question of food for the crowd was raised in a conference between Jesus and His immediate band of disciples, who advised that the crowd should be dispersed. All agree that the disciples at our Lord's instigation produced five cakes of bread and two of the little salted fishes that were commonly eaten as a relish with them; that our Lord blessed and broke the loaves and distributed through the disciples to the crowd; that all had their hunger appeased; and that the Twelve took their travelling baskets and filled them with fragments after the meal of the five thousand was over.

Matthew adds that this number did not include the women and children who were present; he adds a similar statement in 15. 39.

John gives several additional details which do not



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affect the main story but do help us to imagine the scene more clearly : these details are so distinctly supplementary that they suggest he was writing with the synoptic record before him, or in his mind, and that he added touches of personal remembrance, recalling the parts played by his former comrades in those past events. He tells us that Philip (who was "of Bethsaida") was the disciple to whom Jesus suggested that the people must be catered for, and that Philip was not enthusiastic, considering it an impossible proposal : that Andrew (another man from Bethsaida) knew of a little lad there who had brought his luncheon of five barley scones and dried fish relish. John mentions the money that would be needed and the grassy nature of the spot, adding in confirmation of his reference to the spring growth of herbage that it was near Passover-time ; and he says that the gathering of the broken victuals was by Christ's command. This evangelist alone tells the effect produced on the crowd by the experience ; their conclusion that "the Prophet" long expected had indeed come ; and their excitement, culminating in an attempt to raise a revolt and force Jesus into leadership. The fourth Gospel helps the realization of the scene and enables us to understand why the disciples, in danger of being infected with this political enthusiasm, were "constrained" to get aboard their boat, and why Jesus Himself dismissed the people—He did not desire to start a desert rebellion, raise the standard of revolt and bring down upon His countrymen the inevitable consequences of conflict with Rome.

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John gives on the next day a discourse by Jesus delivered at Capernaum, taking this desert meal as its text (6. 22-end). Of this the Bishop of Gloucester (*The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ*, p. 279) says, "It may be doubted whether such a discourse was ever spoken," adding, however, that it is an admirable example of the way in which John interprets correctly the teaching of Jesus, Who meant spiritual lessons to be drawn from all that He did. John tells us that when Jesus thus checked their excitement the people began to lose faith in Him (v. 66): the incident was critical and marked the climax of the Galilean ministry—and, practically, its close. From this point Jesus was chiefly engaged in the training of the Twelve.

A very similar account of provision made in the wilderness is given in Mk. 8. 1-9 and reproduced in Matt. 15. 32-39. This is most probably another version of the same story, derived by Mark from a source other than Peter, his chief authority. Except in the numbers given, the two stories are almost identical; though the second lacks the vividness of the earlier one. It is narrated as if the first had never happened, and it is very difficult, if the "five thousand" story is to stand where it does, to understand how the disciples could ask such a question as that reported in Mark's fourth verse: surely the mere mention of a meal would have sent them to bring their supplies for Him to bless and break! While the earlier story takes its proper place in the narrative, this account of the four thousand seems quite unconnected with what precedes and its close leaves the history exactly



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where it was at the end of the former incident. Whether it be regarded as an additional, independent testimony of that story derived from an inferior narrator, or whether it be taken as an account of a distinct occurrence, it is so precisely similar that the words with which Archbishop Trench introduced it in his classic work may well conclude our reference to it :—

“ Almost everything which might have been said upon this miracle, the preceding one of the same nature has anticipated already : to which the reader is therefore referred.” (*Notes on the Miracles*, p. 362.)

In Luke's account, in his sixteenth verse, by a change of tense not easy to reproduce in English translation, the writer seems to intimate that the miracle of multiplication took place between the act of breaking and the continuous distribution. The touch of Jesus, that is, did for the bread what the touch of the soil does for the seed-corn. One mystery is really as great as the other, though we are accustomed to the one and speak of it as a natural process. Of the method of the one we may know a little ; we may explain how the different tissues are produced from different portions of the walls of the original germ-cell ; may detect the presence of the starch and sugar granules and the mineral salts in the sap ; may establish by analysis the presence and proportions of hydrogen, oxygen, silicon, iron, phosphorus and so on. But *why* the chemical reactions should take place, how or whence the impulse comes for the co-operation of sun, seed, and soil, we do not know—“ the earth bringeth forth fruit of itself ” (Mk. 4. 28).

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To say that this miracle is an inconceivable interference with the laws of nature is to overlook the very partial state of the knowledge we possess of those laws: the biologist's experiments with nitrogen-producing bacteria, reports of the effects of electrical stimulations of vegetable growth, warn us against too confident dogmatism. The analogy is of a cautionary value merely: it would be quite useless to suggest that Jesus was using scientific knowledge which the rest of mankind is gradually acquiring. That does not 'remove' the miracle.<sup>1</sup>

The first Christians believed that their Master who could heal diseases could also control nature to a greater extent than appears credible to our thought. Whether it is logical to be inclined to believe that miraculous changes may occur where human will and faith directly co-operate and to limit such changes to that sphere may well be considered. After all, those changes all take place in the sphere of "nature," and the will and faith of Jesus Christ may perhaps be permitted to count for something.

A difficulty with some who would by no means rule out miracles is that the story seems inconsistent with the usual methods of our Lord; that such an act belongs to the type of magical, non-natural signs which He steadily refused to give (cf. Mk. 8. 11 f.), and for which there is no adequate occasion here. They consider that it contradicts the principle which He laid down for Himself at the time of the first Temptation. Professor Bartlet, for example, says it "cuts across the fundamental principle of Jesus's whole method of bringing home

<sup>1</sup> See p. 93.



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to men gradually the conviction of essential Messiahship, for fear of misunderstanding." Others consider there is an insufficiency of motive or reason for so great a supersession of normal methods.

There is a characteristic motive implied—if John's narrative be regarded as careful history it is more than implied—in the fact of human need recognized by Christ. It was not His *purpose* in life to relieve human want and suffering, but wherever He saw it the impulse of His compassion made it inevitable that He should seek to relieve it. We have many evidences of His special sensitiveness to the evil of physical hunger (Was this a consequence of His wilderness experience?): see for examples Mk. 2. 25; 5. 43; 8. 2; Matt. 6. 11; 25. 35. Perhaps the conflict between this story of the relief of the body-needs of others and the temptation-story of a refusal to use His powers to supply His own needs is more apparent than real.

These objections have given rise to various explanations on the lines of Dr. Abbott's theory that this was really a kind of first sacrament; that Jesus consecrated the common people for the service of the Kingdom by giving them spiritual food. The communion would be one of great importance and, influenced by the story of 2 Kings 4. 42-44, was transformed in the telling into a miraculous event. If the occasion was a spiritual sacrament it was a failure, for its effect was that they tried to seize Him and make Him a king; this might be a result from a work that aroused general excitement at His apparently unlimited power, but not from the kind of sacramental teaching recorded in Jn. 6.

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22 ff., for that had precisely the opposite effect (see v. 66).

Professor Menzies follows Paulus in attempting to "rationalize" the history as a sharing of supplies among the crowd, encouraged thereto by the example of Jesus. He suggests that others, like the "little lad," had brought provision with them; that it is not said that five loaves were all that could be found on the spot (if so, vv. 38, 39 of Mark's account are rather misleading). He thinks that "miracle" is a too hasty conclusion from what is not said rather than from what is definitely stated; and that Jesus by His teaching transformed a crowd of individuals, each concerned with his own needs and their supply, into a great brotherhood, single family of God, desirous to have all things in common. To achieve this by personal influence of such short duration was, he considers, indeed a spiritual miracle. The sequel would seem to suggest that the influence was indeed of disappointingly short duration.

Dr. A. C. Headlam (*The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ*, p. 375) counsels a suspense of judgment. We need not disbelieve a wonderful event simply "because our imagination cannot picture to ourselves the way in which it could have happened." And in relation to these "nature" miracles there is no compelling difficulty that need make us anxious to adopt a rationalistic explanation.

"It is quite easy to devise rationalistic explanations, but they are never really convincing." (*Ibid.*)



## THE WITHERED FIGTREE

(Matt. 21. 18-20 ; Mk. 11. 12-14, 20, 21. Compare Lk. 13. 6-9)

THERE is one narrative connected with the events of Passion-week in Matthew and Mark which cannot be omitted from this study without some explanation. It is not found in Luke, who, however, records a parable of a similar tenor which is not in Matthew's Gospel or Mark's. Both narrative and parable have to do with a barren figtree.

The words used in common by the three evangelists are—

“ Figtree . . . went . . . and on it found not.”

Incident and parable follow a common line of thought ; expected fruit—disappointment—destruction. The characters in the parable are the owner of the vineyard and his gardener, and the owner pronounces sentence of destruction against the tree.<sup>1</sup> There is some definite connection between the incident in the first two Gospels and the parable in the third.

Mark and Matthew say that on the Monday morning as Jesus and His disciples were going from Bethany to Jerusalem

“ he hungered. And seeing a figtree by the wayside, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only.”

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Stories of the Kingdom*, pp. 128-130.

## THE WITHERED FIGTREE

That is Matthew's account. Mark says the tree was "in leaf, some distance away," and explains its barrenness by adding "for it was not the time for figs."

"He saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever."

Mark's account passes on to Jerusalem; the cleansing of the temple is described, and the party's return to Bethany for the night. Next morning on their way to the city they noticed the figtree was completely withered (the word in both Gospels is "withered *up*"—from its very root, that suggests). Peter remembered and said,

"Rabbi, behold, the figtree which thou cursedst is withered away."

Peter's blunt description of our Lord's words as "cursing" conveys to us a sense of vehemence, not to say coarseness, which was not present in his own mind; there is no hint of anger in the narrative. Matthew's story has no interval and omits any direct reference to Peter—

"And immediately the figtree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How did the figtree immediately wither away?"

Our Lord's reply was given to Peter's comment, according to Mark; in Matthew it answers the disciples' query. It was an exhortation to faith and to prayer, and an assurance to them that if they did not entertain a doubt in their hearts it



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would be possible to say to Mount Olivet, "Throw yourself into the sea," and it would be done. The same strong figure with regard to faith is repeated in Matt. 17. 20 and in Lk. 17. 6 in contexts in which it is more easily at home.

Luke has omitted this story, which was in the Markan source that he and Matthew used so freely in their compilations; but this is not by any means his only omission. Probably he had the parabolic form of the story from one of his other sources of information and preferred the parable to the incident.

Matthew has tried to avoid the interruptions of the Markan narrative by rearranging and condensing his material. He has omitted Mark's comment that it was not the season of figs, which suggests that there was something unreasonable in going to look for them at that time. This particular difficulty is disposed of by the fact that the figtree has two crops a year. The "firstripe figs" (cf. Isa. 28. 4) are produced on the old wood simultaneously with the leaf-buds, and a figtree in full leaf should have plenty of them. They are eaten, often as windfalls, by the working-folk, and can still be found for sale in the poorer quarters of Jerusalem. The second or true crop forms on the new wood and matures in August or September—"the season of figs." The *paggim*, or early green figs, may be the ones alluded to by Isaiah as the "firstripe figs," but Passover-time is too soon even for them, as they are not really edible till about June. Before then no one would be likely to seek them in order to allay the pangs of hunger; on

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a tree in full leaf they would be present but hardly edible.

Professor G. E. Post suggests that—

“immediately the disappointment of unsatisfied hunger was lost in the moral lesson that flashed across His mind.”  
(Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 6.)

Does this satisfactorily account for His unusual action? Hitherto we have always seen Jesus using His power for acts of beneficence or of instruction; here, apparently that power is used for an act of destruction, and against a senseless tree, whose only fault seems to have been its inability to meet an unseasonable demand begotten of our Lord's personal need; on an occasion of much more pressing need (Matt. 4. 2) He had deliberately refused to use that power.

Even the most conservative scholarship finds in this incident an acted parable. Luke preferred the parable to the action. Our earliest narrative has no suggestion of symbolism, but only the evidence of power, and, as a moral, counsel which appears to have been given on other and more appropriate occasions. If there was a moral lesson to be applied to Jerusalem or to the Jewish nation, which Luke's use of the parable suggests to the greater number of commentators, those who chronicled the incident appear to have lost sight of it in their interest in the wonder wrought.

On the whole it seems more probable that a parable of our Lord's, suggested possibly by a figtree with no signs of fruit, has been taken by Mark as an account of an historical incident, the parable being



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mistakenly translated into an action. Professor B. W. Bacon commenting on the suggestion that it is an acted parable says :

“The only real parallel in the story of Jesus is the *parable* (unaccompanied by any narrative of fact) of the Stater in the Fish's Mouth, Matt. 17. 24-27. The propensity of the reader, if not of the evangelist himself, to take this symbolic direction to Peter as implying the real execution of a miracle, shows how easily a symbolic sentence of death, directed against the figtree as the representative of unrepentant Israel, might be taken to imply its literal withering away.” (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i. 594.)

## MIRACLES AND NATURAL LAW

THE foregoing five stories do not all stand on the same level; the evidence is not the same for all of them, and for one of them at least—the Withered Fig-tree—our original authorities vary in their views of the story. But one thing they have in common: they all appear to set aside our usual ideas of the order of nature. Because of this they give rise to questions of a kind to which the modern mind is peculiarly sensitive. Some seek to “explain” them, as has been suggested in our studies, in order to harmonize them with the ideas of natural science; others have more summarily dismissed them because if true they would be “breaches of natural law,” or “violations of the law of nature”; as such they would throw the mechanism of the universe out of gear—like the standing still of the sun and moon—and are therefore impossible.

Such phrases as “natural law” need to be pondered, for we are in danger of using them too easily. What, precisely, do we mean by a breach of natural law? Can a “natural law” be broken? How, for example, would one violate the law of gravity? If a man walks on the ground, or rises into the air, or falls, Humpty-dumpty-like, from a height, the law of gravity is involved; but none of these proceedings can be said to violate it. It affects each activity to a different end, but remains itself identical and unchanged in all of them.



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To go back a step further, what do we mean by a Law of Nature? The whole idea of a world order governed by natural law needs thinking out carefully and precisely. "Natural Law" is a phrase we use in attempting to give expression to observed facts. Are we quite sure that all the facts are before us? That law of gravity, for example—because we are familiar with the concept we say that everything heavier than air *must* fall unless it is supported. This "necessity" is a deduction from our observations on the subject. All that nature shows us is that things actually are so and that the process is uniform so far as human experience goes. Things in nature are what they are: they know nothing of "necessity." We are in danger of talking about "Laws of Nature" as if they were deities ruling the world, or, at least, as a compulsion laid on things. But really it is in our minds that the "compulsion" exists, a kind of logical constraint apart from which our minds cannot function. To speak by the card, "Law" and "Necessity" are subjective and not objective realities. To make them into world rulers is to introduce, in the name of science, that very anthropomorphism which is sneered at in religion.

"The servility or bondage of the heavenly bodies to the law of gravity is just as much interpolated into nature as the fancy of Helios driving his golden car." (Wendland, *Miracles and Christianity*, Expositor's Library Ed., p. 268.)

A second consideration which is needed to guard us against an unreflecting use of current terms is that an unyielding application of the principle of cause and effect would finally reduce the universe to a

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gigantic kaleidoscope in which all "becoming" is simply a rearranging of the imprisoned materials. In reality, of course, one can only have the idea of "cause" when one starts with the fact that there is something new to be explained and related to the rest of the scheme of things. However strong the links of the chain of cause and effect may be there is always room and possibility for the play of movement. The botanist who cross-fertilizes his sweet-peas may be able to foretell with great accuracy how the colours of the next generation will vary; but he acknowledges there is always a possible "sport" which may become a new variety. There is, for instance, the oak-leaved variety of the greater celandine, which first appeared spontaneously in a botanist's garden in 1590 and has remained constant ever since. The existing links of causation in any one particular instance that may be selected leave open a multitude of possibilities. There is always the possibility of new beginnings; God's rule is free even in the realm of nature: if He be truly God, nature must always be at His disposal. Let us remember that we are still far from knowing all about all the forces of nature.

How general this gratuitous assumption about natural law has become is shown by an otherwise helpful view of the cosmos given by Sir Oliver Lodge, who speaks of the religious conception as—

"that of a universe lying open to all manner of spiritual influences, permeated through and through with a Divine spirit . . . a universe by no means self-sufficient or self-contained, but with feelers at every pore groping into another



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supersensuous order of existence, where reign laws hitherto unimagined by science, but laws as real and as mighty as those by which the natural universe is governed." (*Hibbert Journal*, Oct. 1902.)

Here again "laws" are "become as gods" and reign in might and reality. It would surely be simpler and more scientific to say with the New Testament that in all and through all and over all is God.

On page 39 we quoted the Bishop of Gloucester as counselling a suspense of judgment; but that is not intended to suggest a foreclosing of enquiry. Indeed, we must ask and seek and knock; then doors will open and seekers make discoveries. The peril is not one of foreclosed enquiry but of foreclosed minds, and that is a peril which is not limited to elderly intellects; it is a result of mental inertia occasioned only too often by judgments passed on insufficient data and before all the facts are ascertained.

One fact which each story exhibits in ever stronger light is the fact of Jesus. This cannot be omitted save at the risk of falsifying all our conclusions. What of Him? In these stories—

"He shows Himself Lord of the destroying powers of nature, Lord of the famine and the storm, of diseases of body and mind, and even over the power of the grave." (D. S. Cairns, D.D., in *Christ and Human Need*, 1912, p. 184.)

How can these things be—in such a universe as we conceive ours to be? If we cannot answer the question let us face some others which may suggest an answer.

"Did He alone of all mankind live in perfect communion with God? If He did, then He is not only exceptional but

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absolutely unique in human history. Now if we have got something absolutely new in human history, by what law of reason can we vindicate the assumption that Nature must react upon Him as she reacts on all others? " (*Ibid.* p. 178.)

If we have a revelation in the person of Jesus which is not adequately explicable by the previous history of religion, then the way is open for incidents which will transcend any analogies of experience elsewhere.

To some, the "nature" miracles present graver problems than deeds in which the motives of mercy and compassion are obviously a considerable factor: but if it comes to a mere question of "rationalizing" the deeds attributed to Jesus the one class is neither more "possible" nor more "probable" of accomplishment by explicable phenomena than the other. Why should not the resources of Jesus which enabled Him to deal so successfully with a great variety of illnesses and physical disabilities have been equally adequate for the production of the wilderness food-supply or the stilling of the tempest? The distinction made between acts of healing and "nature" or "cosmic" miracles serves only a very limited purpose. Both were equally modifications of the course of that abstraction called "natural law," for the cures effected by Jesus were beyond all the medical ability of His time. Probably the distinction will cease to be drawn when there is a more general recognition of that essential unity of the universe suggested by Sir Oliver Lodge—that "material" and "spiritual" are not separate compartments with mutually independent activities, but interwoven and reacting on each other at every



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point. The "laws" of gravitation or of space, or of any of the categories of science, are no more and no less obstacles to Divine power than those of physiology or anatomy which are involved in any consideration of disease. There is no *essential* difference of quality; the "nature" miracles are quite conceivable as extensions of human faculty, mental or spiritual.

If a rigidly scientific standpoint refuses any suggestion that a transcendent factor may act within the realm of nature, its own hypothesis of cause and effect must be shown to have an adequate interpretation of the fact of Jesus.

The conceptions of "natural law" and "causality" are derived from things as we see and know them, are, in fact, empirical; they do leave room for other categories. There is room in the universe, even in the universe as we know it, for miracle. Probably the question concerning some of these acts, the walking on the lake and the like, must be decided by a consideration of their relation to the general picture of the character of Jesus. Usually His teaching and His aid were given without any setting aside of what we may call the natural order. Assuming that such a setting aside was possible, the question becomes: Would He on these three or four occasions suspend that natural order which held good for Him throughout His earthly life? Is there, from the point of view of His work and purpose, a good and sufficient reason for such action? It is not a question to be answered until the greatness of His task, the needs of His workmen, and the significance of the events have their full recognition.

## THE CURE OF DISEASE

MOST of the recorded miraculous acts of Jesus are deeds of healing. It is not practicable to classify them precisely and say that so many were cases of possession, so many of blindness, so many of deafness, or paralysis, or leprosy, or fever, because, as often happens in normal medical practice, "misfortunes do not come singly," and also because the descriptions given are not always definite enough to enable us to say what would be a modern physician's diagnosis of the cases.

The number of these acts of healing in the accounts of our Lord's ministry warrants the assumption that popular interest centred largely on this aspect of His work. Modern medicine emphasizes the importance of the physician's personality as a factor in healing disease, and it is reasonable to expect that the stories of cures effected by Jesus will be of great value as evidences of what He was. We must keep in mind the vastly different condition of medical knowledge in His day, lest we judge the significance of His deeds too easily in the light of modern theories; we must recognize the influence of popular beliefs alike on sicknesses and their cure. Frequently we may have to content ourselves with "possible" conditions and "possible" conclusions, simply because there is not sufficient evidence in the records to enable us to arrive at an exact diagnosis of the sicknesses mentioned. We have not the information



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needed to describe them in accordance with modern medical terminology or to decide whether modern skill would or would not regard them as curable.

The very general belief in a causal connection between sin and suffering, which we find expressed in the Old Testament, was a common assumption among the majority of our Lord's contemporaries and fellow-countrymen ("Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jn. 9. 2. Cf. also C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. lxxxviii). Luke (13. 1-5) gives us in the references to the slaughtered Galileans and the victims of the collapse of the tower in Siloam Jesus's repudiation of the popular mechanical theory; on other occasions He recognized that connection between sin and disease which is obvious to anyone who has an elementary knowledge of the laws of physical well-being and the natural consequences of their disregard. But this question may be examined to better advantage when we come to consider a case in point.

Another popular Syrian idea in our Lord's time was the ascription of various forms of sickness to demonic agency. Whilst there has been a considerable attempt to minimize the prevalence of this belief in Palestine in His day (*e. g.* Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, ch. xiii; Loewe, article, "Demons and Spirits," *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*), it is fairly evident from the Gospels that it did exist as a popular belief. It may have been more common in Galilee, among the "people of the land," than in Judæa among the metropolitans: possibly it was largely Babylonian

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in origin—Hillel, the great rabbi at Jerusalem just prior to our Lord's ministry, was a Babylonian by birth; but the large amount of demonology in the Babylonian Talmud must bear some reasonable relation to the earlier beliefs of the Jews. It is certain that in Assyria and Babylonia from very early times disease was believed to be caused by demons. The incantations for the cure of disease translated from the clay tablets and amulets are based on the assumption that some active hostile power, usually invisible, has invaded the sufferer's person and must be expelled. This applies not merely to morbid mental and nervous conditions, but to colds, fevers, headaches, and "all the ills that flesh is heir to." Professor Jastrow's article on "The Religion of Babylonia" in the fifth volume of Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* throws some interesting light on this subject and quotes from the tablets magical formulas for expelling the demons. It appears that they often descended in the form of a dust-cloud; and washing was recommended, as well as prayers, for demons do not like water (cf. "waterless places," Matt. 12. 43). Sunset and dewfall were dangerous times to be abroad, for the demons were active at such hours; crowded places were to be avoided because human beings who were possessed could infect others by their breath or spittle. There was a mosquito kind of demon, also a dog kind, both very dangerous. Demons mostly had no real shape or size; they could be swarming in one's hand, or eye; they could be drawn in or out with one's breath by nose or mouth; they were so cunning that they were liable



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to be swallowed with one's food or water, making it a practice to lurk in these necessities so as to get inside a man—indeed, it was only common prudence to beware of drinking strange water when its antecedents were unknown. All this reads rather like a version of the germ theory of disease written for children. This dread of an unknown, invisible foe, prone to lurk in unsuspected places and persons, who might be passed on by a neighbour's mere breath, who could enter a man's body "unbeknown" and cause sundry sicknesses, pestilences and fevers, delirium, loss of self-control and so on, gives quite a good working theory for preventive medical practice. For the demons of the witch-doctor substitute the germs of the bacteriologist, for the incantations of the clay tablet, some of the formulas of the newest auto-suggestion schools, and the difference between ancient and modern is, perhaps, more apparent than real!

We do not suggest that in Palestine, in the first century of our era, popular belief ascribed all disease to the influence of demons; the Jews were not back in the age of the clay tablets. It is, however, fair to say that the popular mind ascribed all ailments outside the ordinary diagnoses to some such cause; just as "ill-wishing" and "bewitchment" in mediæval (and later) times were held responsible for "decline" and other forms of bodily ill whose cause was not ascertained.

The idea of the "demon" was interwoven, too, with the theology of the age. The New Testament writers frequently assume that the devil, or the prince of the malignant spirits, has a real power in the world

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which has to be overthrown before God can truly and completely rule the world (cf. 1 Jn. 3. 8; Rom. 16. 10; Eph. 6. 11; 1 Pet. 5. 8, etc.). A good reflection of the popular point of view is preserved in Lk. 10. 17-20, where the disciples rejoice to report that the demons, adjured in the name of Jesus, are obedient to them, and Jesus replies that He beheld Satan fallen, and that He gives them power to trample on every agency of evil and be unharmed thereby.

“The new era has already begun to challenge and invade the present sway of the devil on earth. As the context” (of Matt. 12. 28) “indicates, the messianic power of Jesus on earth denotes an inroad upon the demons who, under Satan, have control of men, and this inroad is the entrance of God’s Kingdom upon its final career.” (Moffatt, *The Theology of the Gospels*, p. 50.)

As “possession” is so clearly a diagnosis for all disorders that were uncanny in their manifestation, and as it is the popular explanation by which every mysterious ill is accounted for, the numerous cases of it in the Gospels call for first consideration in the study of the miracles of healing.



## THE POSSESSED MAN IN THE CAPERNAUM SYNAGOGUE

(Mk. i. 23-28 ; Lk. 4. 33-37)

MARK's Gospel makes the expulsion of demons an outstanding feature of the earlier Galilean ministry. He differentiates demon-possession from other physical ills more clearly than Matthew or Luke, who include cases where the main symptoms are blindness, dumbness, etc. His first instance is in the synagogue at Capernaum and is part of a graphic picture he is drawing of Jesus' unconventional way of keeping the Sabbath, and of the authoritative quality of the Master's words and deeds. The account is reproduced in Luke with merely literary alterations.

"There was in the synagogue a man in an unclean spirit."

Possibly Mark's phrase describing the malady is simply a poor Greek translation of the Aramaic, which, had he given it literally, would be "in whom was a demon." Luke was not satisfied with the phrase, perhaps was not decided in his own mind whether the man was in possession of a demon or whether a demon was in possession of him: anyhow, with true professional caution the "beloved physician" is more vague in his description of this mysterious complaint. He writes "a man having a spirit of an unclean demon."

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This man makes his presence known by breaking in upon the calm of the assembly with the characteristic noisiness of sufferers liable to sudden loss of self-control :

“What is there in common to us and thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Thou hast come to destroy us.<sup>1</sup> I know Thee Who thou art, the One who belongs wholly to God.”

This sudden outburst portrays vividly the confusion of consciousness and the blurred sense of personal identity which is so often associated with the delusions of the mentally afflicted. Every mental hospital knows the patient who believes that he is someone other than his actual self. The use of the first person plural in one sentence and of the first person singular in the next exhibits this loss of “self” possession which, to the popular mind, was evidence of possession by some alien personality. The uncanny intuitions of the “insane” person are clearly reproduced: the question implies, “What is there that gives you the right to interfere with us?” although there has been no sign that our Lord had any such intention; similarly, the statement as to the identity of Jesus, “the Holy One of God” (cf. Jn. 6. 69) is intuitive, and typical of the way unbalanced persons tend to reflect what is passing in the popular mind.<sup>2</sup> (There are, however, many details in the

<sup>1</sup> Preferable punctuation to the interrogative.

<sup>2</sup> “The half-witted will often say openly what the sane man, with all the inhibitions which prudence and common sense create, will hesitate to reveal or express.” (A. C. Headlam, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ*, p. 185.)



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Gospel records which show that all sorts of folk were conscious that Jesus radiated an atmosphere of divine power and goodness.)

Jesus "rebuked"—a technical word for exorcism—the spirit, saying,

"Be quiet, and come out of him."

So Mark reports, but Luke varies the command slightly, "Come out away from him." Again we have the physician's uncertainty as to whether the sufferer was assailed by the demon from without or from within.

There is no hint of any treatment other than by this emphatic command. The command is in harmony with popular ideas of exorcism—and therefore, as we should say, humours the delusion of the sufferer—but is very different in its direct form and its note of personal authority from the current rituals of orthodox exorcism. The result is described in varying phrase by the two writers, Mark using a popular expression and Luke a more medical term for the convulsion which follows upon the word of command. The physician-evangelist adds that the convulsive seizure caused the man to fall down among the congregation (as if in an epileptic fit), and that when it passed he was unhurt—again a medical term to indicate that "no after ill-effects resulted from the fall."

Both writers note the astonishment of the crowd, describing it by a word that implies it was not un-mixed with fear. Mark gives staccato sentences which reproduce the actual comments heard in the excited crowd as they discuss the cure. The people took the fact of demon-possession for granted,

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and Jesus appeared to accept—and thereby endorse—their belief. We shall have occasion to refer to this matter at a later stage.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus restored to this man his personal freedom of will and the self-control which he had obviously lost, either because of what medical parlance would term a “hysterical neurosis” or from some other cause. It may reasonably be inferred from the man’s presence in the synagogue and from his normal behaviour for some time that he suffered from periodic attacks which came on quite suddenly. “Self” possession was regained when our Lord ordered the departure of an intrusive spiritual entity within the man.

Dr. George Matheson suggests that the “authority” which astonished the crowd was really the authority of His divine sympathy with the afflicted man :

“To the physician of a mental ailment, the first thing requisite is that he should put himself in the place of the sufferer. . . . If I have to deal with the mentally afflicted, I must contract my own nature so as to meet theirs. I must learn to think with their thoughts, to see with their eyes, to palpitate with their delusions. . . . I must meet them on their own ground, not on mine. I must reason with them on their own assumptions, not on mine. I must study to imagine things as I have *not* felt them, to deal with things as I have *not* known them. There is no such self-abnegation as is involved in the contact with mental disease. . . . For Him to enter into the spirit of the demoniac was a meeting of extremes. It was wisdom trying to picture the path of folly; it was the calmness of implicit trust seeking to figure

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 84, 88, 89. The argument of Lk. II. 14–26 should be considered in this connection.



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the terrors of a shattered brain." (*Studies in the Portrait of Christ*, 1st Ser., pp. 169-171.)

It has been suggested that there is a marked difference in our Lord's method of treatment when He is dealing with cases of demoniacs; that there is no appeal to faith, no physical contact with the afflicted person, and so on; and that such features mark off a distinct class of healing miracle. It is too early in our study to generalize on this point. The story here certainly seems to fulfil these conditions; if the same applies to all other cases, and if in cases where there is no suggestion of possession there is always the appeal to faith and the physical contact, the distinction may have meaning. "Faith" is not always awakened by a verbal demand, however; and before giving the story of the man Mark's account says that our Lord's teaching had aroused astonishment, especially by its note of personal authority (Mk. 1. 22). Such an atmosphere would be one not unfavourable; there would be wonder, and expectancy, and where these are, "faith" such as He asked for is not far off.

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(Matt. 8. 28-34; Mk. 5. 1-20; Lk. 8. 26-39)

MARK's second case of possession is that of the madman of the tombs on the eastern shore of Genesaret. It is very fully recorded by him; and both the parallel accounts are abbreviated versions of his story. Luke does not supply any additional facts, but he modifies the language, deletes some details, and betrays his usual medical interest. Matthew says there were *two* "demonized men." If he is right it is curious that Mark and Luke with their longer stories never give so much as a hint of the second man's presence. The explanations that have been offered are the superior notoriety of the one, or his surpassing fierceness and violence which eclipsed his meeker comrade, or that this was the one who became a disciple and so of more permanent interest than the other (cf. Mk. 5. 20). More probably the change is due to Matthew's Jewish traditions of literary form. His book is built up on an arithmetical principle of three-fold, five-fold, or seven-fold rhythms and his illustrative instances are in groups. In this section, presumably in conformity with his mathematics, he has omitted the account of the possessed man in the Capernaum synagogue—he had Mark's text before him—but implies that he is aware of it by conflating it with this case. Of the three accounts Mark's is the most pictorial and most natural in its reflection of popular



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ideas and expressions. The later evangelists amend its expression in places, modify its peasant-like character—in the description of the madman, one can imagine Peter the fisherman gripping his audience with the realism of his description!—and substitute in some details their own expressions and ideas.

The identity of the locality is an ancient puzzle. The "Gerasa" of Mark and Luke is replaced in our texts of Matthew by "Gadara." Both places are identifiable sites, but neither satisfies the scenery required by the story. Gadara, the capital of Peræa, was up in the hills, too far from the lake. Gerasa was a city of the Decapolis, but it lay thirty miles south-east of Gennesaret. The probabilities are in favour of the place whose ruins are now known as Khersa; perhaps the original Greek was a transliteration of this name and Matthew did not recognize it. Khersa lies in the centre of the eastern shore of the lake, in a district abounding with limestone caverns and rockhewn tombs, and had a bluff descending to the waters suitable to the scene described. The chief point about the locality is that it is in Peræa and among the largely Gentile population of the Decapolis district; herds of swine, for example, would have been much more unlikely on the western shore among a more distinctly Jewish population.

Our Lord and His companions are described as landing from the boat at this place, and, from the tombs, a man "in an unclean spirit"—Luke describes him as "having demons"—approached the party.

Popular folklore held that demons lurked among

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tombs and supposed that their ranks were recruited from the spirits of the dead. Something of this idea survives, possibly, in the superstitious dread of crossing a churchyard at night. The tendency of sufferers of certain types of mania to make cemeteries their natural haunt was noted by the medical profession as far back as Galen (see Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, p. 14).

Mark's description of this madman is extremely vivid. The mania was of so violent a type that "no one could bind him, not even with a chain—for many times he had been bound with fetters and chains and had burst the chains and broken the fetters to pieces, and nobody was strong enough to subdue him. Day and night he roamed among the tombs and on the hillsides, shrieking and gashing himself with sharp stones."

Luke finds this rustic instinct for realism lacking in refinement and gives to His Excellency Theophilus a more restrained account of a man who lived in the local cemetery and went about naked. This, probably, is a deduction from the statement that he destroyed everything that was put upon him: or Luke, as a medical man, knows that the destruction of all clothing is a common propensity in certain forms of insanity, duly noted among symptoms by the profession. This evangelist, however, emphasizes the demonic nature of the affliction by a more frequent use of the term "demon" and by reference to the madman's habit of wandering off to desert places, for which demons had a special affection (cf. Matt. 12. 43), and by his final reference to the "abyss" or proper home of demons.



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Both evangelists depict a violent madman, uncontrollable and lacking all self-control, liable to frenzies in which he was a danger to himself and to others. Mark describes his rush towards the new-comers, his sudden check, which is explained in parenthesis as due to the fact that Jesus "kept saying to him, 'Unclean spirit, come out of the man!'" (Luke's phrasing of the command again shows the cautious physician, uncertain of the exact diagnosis; cf. p. 56). The exorcism was unsuccessful, and the man in frenzy cried,

"Jesus, Son of God Most High, what business have you with me? I adjure you, by God, do not torture me."

Instinctive and immediate recognition of Jesus is not of necessity implied by this speech. The explanatory parenthesis shows that the narrative is compressed, and it is possible that the madman heard from those present the name of this new exorcist. It has been suggested, and with reason, that "Son of God Most High" is a form of address more likely to come from a Gentile than a Jew. But a demented Jew, living among Gentiles, would readily assimilate their modes of speech; so that we cannot make any definite deduction from this as to the nationality of the man.

The non-success of the repeated commands reveals the deep-seated nature of the malady: Jesus therefore guarded against the consequences of a too-violent transition by seeking to recall the man more gradually to a normal sense of his personal identity, and to this end asked his name. An alternative interpretation of the question as one addressed

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to the demon and not to the man would mean that our Lord was demanding a piece of information necessary for successful exorcism as popularly understood; spells for casting out demons often contain lists of names of these supposed denizens of the abyss, the theory being that if the demon's name was known he who held the knowledge was master of the situation and must be obeyed. The name, to the ancients, was full of the significance of the owner's personality; compare, for example, the story of wrestling Jacob (Gen. 32).

The demented man answered in the capacity of the alien "control,"

"My name is Legion, for we are many."

The interchange of singular and plural marks even more clearly than in the former case (*v. p. 57*) a type of mental disorder which involves "double consciousness" or a dissociation of personality; it is evidence of the man's loss of self-control and of personal identity. There is much shrewd diagnosis implied in the homely phrase which describes one whose mind is in any way deranged as being "not quite himself." Latham notes that a little girl at play was asked if she would be a regiment of horse and she immediately objected that she could only be one, not a regiment. This, he says, is normal mentality.

"In New Testament times no one had ever heard of double consciousness and no one drawing from imagination would have hit upon a detail so psychologically true." (*A Service of Angels.*)

Possibly this feature of the narrative encouraged Matthew (who has omitted all reference to *one*



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individual in the final petition and in Christ's injunction) to suppose that the narrative required two demoniacs and to amend his version accordingly.

There is no evidence that the Roman military term "legion" was then used popularly in the sense of a large number: our use of it is probably derived from this New Testament story. Was this, perhaps, some unfortunate countryman driven mad by his experience of military terrorisation? Was he a bit of human wreckage left by some act of ruthless "quieting" of a disturbed district, such as was common enough in the maintenance of Rome's authority in the turbulent Galilean area? (An instance of this is quoted in Lk. 13. 1). If so, "Legion" is the ever-present memory of an experience of horror, anguish and loss that had unseated his reason and remains the sole explanation of his present misery in his bewildered brain.

A sympathetic mutual understanding was established by this conversation—we must remember that we have not a full verbatim report—and our Lord's acceptance of his standpoint elicited from the madman himself a suggestion for his cure. A herd of swine was pastured in the neighbourhood. To many Easterns, including Jews, pig was unclean, or "taboo," because unclean spirits were supposed to live in these animals. The madman, still confusing his proper personality with the possessing "demons," requested in their name that they might be permitted to enter the swine. Jesus agreed, and the record tells us that the herd rushed over the cliff's edge into the sea. Perhaps the madman made a sudden rush towards the herd, or the pigs may have caught the contagion of the human

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excitement around them, as domesticated creatures sometimes do; anyway, there was a stampede and the animals jostled each other "down to the abyss" as Luke has it, to the final prison of demons (cf. Rev. 20. 1-3), betrayed thereto by the element of water, which is the special fear and antipathy of unclean spirits (cf. Matt. 12. 43). So the caprice of the sufferer's distorted imagination subserved his cure: the trouble was gone; and gone forever—a factor of importance in permanently establishing the patient's peace of mind.

Huxley's historic attack on this miracle has been very completely answered, and no one would be disposed to enter seriously into the frivolous discussion about compensation of the pig-owners. The rights of humanity, especially of suffering humanity and its needs, are greater than any rights of property, even as divine institutions override human legislation (cf. Mark 10. 4-9).

The instruction to the restored man to report to his own folk, so opposed to Jesus' frequent injunctions to silence, adds some strength to the suggestion that he was a Gentile. At any rate, he was domiciled in a district very infrequently visited by Christ: he went as a herald of this wonderful Healer through the Decapolis, which was largely a Gentile district.

The words of our Lord's commission to the man imply that Jesus regarded Himself merely as the instrument of God in working the cure: it is part of His Mission: He is revealing God as a Father who loves His children and is one with them (the essential idea in "mercy") in their afflictions, and the deep desire of that Father's heart is that they may be whole.



## THE DAUGHTER OF THE SYRO-PHENICIAN WOMAN

(Matt. 15. 21-28; Mk. 7. 24-30)

THE two stories should be read and compared; Matthew introduces so much and omits so much that he appears to be using some source other than Mark's narrative, and we may take the accounts as complementary to each other.

A withdrawal to Gentile territory followed upon the open breach with the ecclesiastical party on the subject of ritual cleanliness. Jesus was seeking—in vain, Mark says—to find rest and privacy beyond the confines of Jewry. His presence there is known, and a woman, Greek by religion (that is a pagan, from the Jewish standpoint), Syrian in speech, Phenician in race, sought Him out. The far-spread rumours of His fame as a healer had reached her, and the news that He is in the neighbourhood determined her to seek His help, for she had a daughter “severely possessed by a demon” (Mark says simply that the daughter “had an unclean spirit”). The racial description of the woman was probably given to make clear the fact that she was a person outside the Jewish religion and sympathies, indifferent to, if not ignorant of, the Messianic expectations: she came to Jesus simply to enlist His sympathy and to persuade Him to expel the demon. She addressed Him as “Sir”—

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Matthew says as "Son of David"; perhaps this was added as a compliment to a Jew. Matthew also says that at first Jesus paid no attention to her.

There is real difficulty in understanding from the narrative the attitude of our Lord. On the face of it Jesus seems to have behaved to this poor heathen exactly as a self-conscious Pharisee might have done. Professor Bruston (*Expository Times*, ix. p. 408) has suggested that the key to the narrative is to be found in the condition of the disciples and the intention of Jesus to teach them a lesson in breadth of view and charity. In other words, it was a sort of acted parable to enable them to realise that a despised heathen might have a faith as real as their own (a parallel is found in the case of the centurion, Matt. 8. 10): His apparent harshness was assumed for a purpose. This strikes one as rather unfeeling; the woman's trouble was poignant enough to her and our Lord is usually mindful enough of another's sensibilities. The "simplicity which was in Christ" hardly supports the theory of so theatrical a pose.

If one would enter into all the circumstances of the case due allowance will surely have to be made for the great pre-occupation of our Lord, for His craving for retirement and quiet begotten of the crisis of His Mission in Galilee. He was facing the problem as to whether the ministry there had reached its close; and His silence may have been merely the mental absorption of one who was considering a supreme problem of His work in all its aspects and trying to reach a decision thereon.

An alternative suggestion is that, as reported by



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Matthew, the woman called Him "Son of David," and Jesus desired to show to her that she had no right of approach if that was really all that she thought of Him; but if He stood to her for a Love that knows no limits, racial or other, if He was her "Lord" and not a mere wonder-worker of another nationality, then she, too, had her place and her lawful claim upon His ministry (cf. F. Warburton Lewis in *Expository Times*, xiii. p. 190).

The encounter took place in the village street or on the public highway; though Mark's statement that Jesus had a temporary lodging (v. 24) beyond the border is often taken to mean that the woman came to His lodgings. The disciples—Jews, for whom it was bad form to be seen talking to a woman in the street—anxious alike for their own and their Master's dignity, which they felt was being compromised by her presence and noisy entreaties, urged Jesus to dismiss her. Roused from His abstraction, He told her that His mission was to the House of Israel. Yet He knew—and the woman divined His heart—that above all considerations of frontiers was the supreme law, the certainty of the response of perfect Love to wholehearted faith. Undeterred by His word, she knelt at His feet to detain Him and pleaded:

"Do help me, Sir!"

"Let the children of the house be attended to first: it is not fair to take the children's bread and give it to the little dogs!"

"No, Sir; but even the little dogs under the table eat the crumbs the children let fall!"

"O woman, you have great faith. Be it as you

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wish. On account of this saying, go your way; the demon has left your daughter."

And she went home and found her daughter prostrate upon the couch and the demon had come out.

Was there gentle raillery in Jesus' reference to the homely proverb about the children's bread? It has had many "explanations" which, somehow, do not carry much conviction. One feels that one needs to hear His tone, see His expression, to know what He meant by it. The woman did not misinterpret Him: hers was an "understanding" temperament, and she promptly matched proverb with proverb. Her intuition penetrated beyond the unsympathetic words and was not deterred by the disapproval of the disciples or the apparent unwillingness of the Master. This persistence, this refusal to be "put off," Jesus interpreted as a great faith, and assured her that the cure was accomplished. She departed, content with His word.

We have no account of symptoms to define in any way the nature of this "demon"; only the note in Mark of the prostration of the child—the languor of early convalescence. It is a slight link with the cases of the man in the Capernaum synagogue and of the epileptic boy; too slight to constitute evidence of any definite complaint; but it may indicate recovery after some form of hysterical attack.

As to method there is nothing, save the significance of its absence. It was "healing at a distance"—"absent treatment," to use the jargon of a modern sect. There was no overt act on the part of our



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Lord; the link between the Healer and His distant patient was the mother's strong faith in Himself and her deep concern for her suffering child. There is something yet to be learnt about the conditions and possibilities of intercessory prayer. Our psychology is too rudimentary and our guesses about telepathy too vague to give us much light; but the facts persist through the ages, and the prayer of faith accomplishes more than this world dreams of—even to the healing of the sick.

As to the conditions on which such healing is possible there is more definite light. "For this saying" means more than that Jesus was pleased with her ready wit. If we have read the story aright, He had instinctively divined her Greek temperament before He quoted the rather discouraging proverb. It is more likely that He was touched by the understanding heart which divined the love and ever-present readiness to help in spite of the preoccupation of His mood. The word is equivalent to "according to your faith be it done unto you." It is "faith" that Jesus most frequently required from His suppliants; not necessarily the patient's faith, but the spiritual atmosphere in which healing was possible. Further instances may enable us to appreciate more precisely what "faith" means. In this incident its manifestation is in a persistent conviction of His ability and willingness to help in a case of need. There is no evidence that "the real force which evoked the patient's cure dwelt in the patient's own mind." On the contrary, as in this case, it is not always the patient's own faith. We live in a universe of inter-

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relations, "none liveth unto himself"; and in this universe there is no arbitrary division of unrelated planes of activity, physical, astral, spiritual and so on. Faith sets in action activities that are non-material, and healings—not necessarily in immediate physical connection with the one whose faith is operative—result. The power to quicken such healing faith into activity is undoubtedly portrayed as present in Jesus to an extraordinary degree.



## THE EPILEPTIC BOY

(Matt. 17. 14-21; Mk. 9. 14-29; Lk. 9. 37-43)

THE scene which followed immediately upon the return from the Transfiguration is recorded most fully by Mark; briefer accounts, evidently condensed from his narrative, are given by Matthew and Luke. There are some obscurities in his story that we cannot clear up: the consternation caused by the arrival of Jesus is one thing for which he gives no adequate reason: it is not clear whether some remarks are addressed to the disciples, the ecclesiastics, or the crowd: we cannot say with certainty what is meant by the gathering of the crowd causing Jesus to hasten with His exorcism, for the crowd seems to have been gathered before His arrival. These are details which do not affect the main narrative—the kind of things that a man telling a story is liable to say and to explain only when some question from a hearer reveals the haziness of the statements. In a way they are evidence for the fact that it is an eye-witness's account, and a confirmation of its historic truth.

Mark reports the father as saying that his boy "has a dumb spirit." Luke says "a spirit takes him" and leaves its nature to be inferred from its effects, which he describes. Matthew says the father described his son as "a lunatic, a severe case." He uses a Greek word for which "lunatic" is the Latin

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equivalent and "moonstruck" the nearest Saxon. This is beyond question a description of epilepsy, the malady which, according to ancient notions, befel those who sinned against the moon in some way or other (cf. Dr. Menzies Alexander, *Demonic Possession in the New Testament*, p. 63). There are still plenty of superstitions which reflect the idea that the moon affects human beings and should be treated with respect—it is not wise to sleep when the moon shines full upon one, it is lucky to turn over one's money when greeting the new moon, it is unlucky to look at a new moon through glass for the first time, and so on.

This gives light on one form, at any rate, of demon-possession in New Testament times. Here is a case, definitely stated to belong to this class of malady, described in terms of "possession," exorcised in set phrase as a "spirit," and equally definitely stated to be epilepsy.

Now epilepsy is a very difficult subject for anything like a plain statement. Even the most skilful neurologists of to-day find it hard to diagnose it with any certainty. It is so closely related to hysteria that many consider it hysteria in a more intense and permanent form; it is sometimes so indistinguishable from insanity that alienists and lawyers are hard put to it to decide whether criminals arraigned on serious charges are or are not the conscious agents of the offences of which they have been accused. In the form of "masked" epilepsy, where the real self is as unconscious of his acts as, say, a sleep-walker, it presents problems in responsibility that it is almost impossible to settle



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satisfactorily. Its attacks differ so in intensity that possibly the involuntary giggling of a class of school-girls and the violent mania of the dangerously insane are simply degrees of one disease, arising from one fundamental cause—a weakness of self-control.

The symptoms of an attack in this particular case are narrated with naïve gusto in Mark. When the “dumb spirit” takes the child, it throws him down—the characteristic fall of an epileptic seizure—and he foams at the mouth and gnashes his teeth; as a result of these frequent seizures he has become emaciated (this realistic touch betrays a reporter who was present at the scene). Luke is not less thrilling. He says that when the spirit seizes the child he gives a sudden shriek and is convulsed until he foams at the mouth, and it almost seems as if he must be torn to pieces by the convulsions.

To this graphic account of the poor lad the father added that the disciples had been asked to expel the spirit and had failed. “They could not,” Matthew and Luke report; “they were not strong enough,” says Mark. Jesus was moved to a reproachful comment of which the moral is that faith and ability to inspire it are essential to a cure; lack of faith and inability to inspire it are fatal obstacles.

Jesus asked for the child to be brought to Him, and Mark and Luke record that the boy immediately had another fit: “the spirit violently convulsed him, and falling on the ground, he rolled about, foaming.”

At this point Mark (only) records a conversation between Jesus and the boy's father.

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“How long has he been like this?”

“From early childhood: and often it has thrown him into fire and into the waters to destroy him. If you can do anything, help us! Have pity on us!”

“‘If you can!’ All things are possible to one who believes.”

Note how Jesus at once protested against the doubt of His ability to help. Was it because nothing could be done on such a hypothesis? because the possibility of healing depended not simply upon what was in Jesus, but partly upon something in the father's confidence that could make His help available for the child? Further, in “one who believes” is Jesus referring to Himself or merely making a general statement? We usually take it in the latter sense; but possibly it should be read in close connection with His protest against the father's “If thou canst,” meaning “of course He can because He believes in God.” In this way He comes to the aid of the discouraged and unhopeful father by an assurance of His own unwavering conviction on which the poor man may assuredly count. What Jesus wants is an answering faith from man. In support of this interpretation we may note that according to Matthew, the disciples were told that it was *their* little-faith, not the father's, which caused their failure.

However we understand the conversation it certainly conveys the fact that a cure does not depend solely upon the ability of Jesus, but can only be evoked by those who have faith. Is it to be faith in Himself, or is it to be faith, *such as He has, in the Father?* Surely, the emphasis of all His teaching



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supports the latter view. Jesus puts this possibility of self-help foremost and His own action as a healer in the background. He requires faith on the part of the patient, or of friends in sympathy with the patient, for the performance of a cure. The burden of many of His exhortations to those who seek for healing is that God is willing to do so much more in and for and through man than man has faith enough to *let* Him do. Everywhere Jesus saw the willingness of Divine love compelled to be inactive because of the unbelief that practically disables God and forces Him to wait for the laggard faith of man :—

“ He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief.” (Mk. 6. 5, 6.)

The father saw at once that our Lord’s protest was reasonable and made an effort, crying out :

“ I do believe. Help my unbelief ! ”

Assuming that Jesus’ protest against the father’s “ If thou canst ” is to be interpreted in the light of the rest of the sentence—that there are no impossibilities where there is faith—the father’s agreement is in his “ I do believe.” He saw that Jesus could help because He had faith. So his prayer, “ Help my unbelief ” means “ Let Thy strong faith support my weak faith and see it through.”

“ Our weak faith may at times be permitted to look through the eyes of some strong soul and may thereby gain a sense of the certainty of spiritual things which before we had not.”  
(Stanton, *The Place of Authority in Religious Belief*.)

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Content with the father's confidence, Jesus turned and "rebuked the unclean spirit"; it is again the technical word for exorcism, and the phrase is the same in Mark and Luke: Matthew says Jesus "rebuked him and the demon came out of him." All evangelists, beyond doubt, regard the affliction as a "possession." Mark alone reports the actual words of the exorcism:

"Deaf and dumb spirit, I charge you, come out of him and do not enter into him any more."

There are two significant things about this report. First, there was no previous mention of deafness: it is a very natural description of the failure of the epileptic to respond to anything said to him in a seizure, and a reasonable deduction from his subsequent ignorance of anything that had taken place during it. The second point is the strong suggestion that there is to be no relapse, no recurrence of these periodic attacks.<sup>1</sup>

The final seizure and convulsion left the boy exhausted and motionless on the ground. We must note, as Mark does, the readiness of the people to say that he is lifeless: it will have a bearing on stories yet to be studied. Jesus took the child by the hand, raised him up and gave him back, healed, to his father.

Afterwards the disciples asked Jesus why they had failed and He told them it was their lack of faith

<sup>1</sup> An interesting, possibly instructive, parallel to this command given to the child whilst he lies unconscious in the fit comes from the schools of hypnotic medicine which frequently report that a patient in a state of insensibility is much more amenable to suggestions which are afterwards faithfully observed in the normal life.



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(Matt. 17. 20; the Sinaitic-Syriac version has "unfaith"). "Faith" has not changed its essential significance here, but is viewed from a different standpoint: it is the confidence of the disciple that he can exercise a like miracle-working power when it is expressly conferred upon him. This Jesus calls "faith in God" (Mk. 11. 22); and in Lk. 18. 8 He identifies it with faith in Himself. The statement in Mark (9. 29) that "this kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer" enables us to trace the connection between prayer and faith, showing prayer as a means whereby faith is made active and available. On more than one occasion Jesus promised the disciples (who were mere men) power to do works like His, and that in immediate connection with prayer; "the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do" (Jn. 14. 12, 13; cf. also 16. 23, 24). The reflection of this teaching, and its implication, is seen in James, "the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick" (5. 15). Before this incident He had given them the power when He sent them to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils" (Matt. 10. 8; and parallels); they had failed in a task within the compass of their ability, partly through lack of a real conviction of their ability, and partly because they had not kept in close enough touch with God. "Our natures cannot work aright until faith is no longer an effort against the grain, but the master-passion of the soul" (W. R. Maltby).

## SOME INFERENCES FROM THE CASES OF POSSESSION

THE four cases we have studied are all described by Mark without qualification as instances of "possession." Other cases which have yet to be considered will illustrate more clearly the use of this idea to explain misfortunes for which the medical skill of the day could find no sufficient cause. There are some considerations that have not come into view in these four stories, but that must influence any final estimate of this type of sickness or its cure.

The frequency of this malady is one important point: it is mentioned as a regular item in the healing ministry in most of the summaries of our Lord's activities. Indicative, too, of its common occurrence is the existence of a recognized class of exorcists in Jewry (Lk. 11. 19) and of irregular but successful imitators of our Lord and His disciples (Mk. 9. 38-41). These exorcists must be taken into account in any conclusions, theological or other, as to the nature and purpose of the healing done by Christ.

Three of the stories examined are the ones which give in greatest detail the phenomena of possession. These phenomena have such clear affinities with hysteria, insanity and epilepsy respectively that they do not seem to require that "demon possession" must be interpreted as an actual invasion of a human



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personality by an alien spiritual entity. It is true that there are several modern records from missionaries in heathen countries of very similar cases of affliction; but their occurrence seems to be conditioned by a general belief in the existence of spirits and demons among the peoples concerned and is in a definite ratio to the state of general culture and to the animistic character of local religious beliefs. In other words, the "demon" is pretty much the same in all ages and is rather a subjective delusion than an objective reality; it is an attempt to explain the mysterious and little understood symptoms of hysteria in its varied degrees.

As we trace the growth of medical knowledge from earliest times we find the stage where the theory of "possession" exists side by side with a more reasoned diagnosis of sickness. In Palestine in our Lord's time probably few doubted that all which modern science would describe as nervous diseases, all lunacy, epilepsy, etc., were the direct work of evil spirits. This belief was the explanation of a wide range of afflictions—the whole province of the neurologist—by no means fully understood or diagnosed as yet, whose common symptom is loss of self-control. Psycho-analysis has made it abundantly clear that control of one's personality is essential to being truly "one's self." Without invoking technicalities like "psycho-neurosis," "anxiety complex," "fundamental ego-complex," and the like, we can understand that the popular mind of two thousand years ago was not qualified to judge the symptoms of such ailments. Even the

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modern, educated type of mind often concludes that the trance of a spiritualistic medium is the possession of that medium's body and brain by a discarnate spirit, when it would be quite as reasonable to suppose that the trance is a partial disintegration of the medium-personality and that the so-called "spirit-control" is merely the unrelated activity of one group of the characteristics whose sum goes to make up the normal complete personality.<sup>1</sup>

If all such perplexing cases, for whose diagnosis first-century doctors had not the most elementary data, were popularly included in one general category we cannot be greatly surprised. The mysterious "brain-storm" of the epileptic, alternating with complete normality, would inevitably suggest invasion by an alien power. The man was "not himself"; then "It" was somebody else!

"Demoniacs" are classed with other sufferers, yet distinguished from them, by the evangelists. Are we to conclude there was a connexion and a difference? In some cases a definite malady, *e. g.*, dumbness, is attributed to an unclean spirit's control and in other cases it is not. A cautious temper will not attach too much importance to the letter of the phrase, and will decide that the malady and the possession are not identical; for insistence on their identity must result in fruitless arguments as to the superior accuracy of one evangelist or another.

It has been argued that Christ addresses the evil spirit as distinct from the man (cf. Mk. i. 25;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Dissociation of a Personality*, Morton Prince.



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Matt. 17. 18), and that He would not "accommodate" thus if there were no corresponding reality to justify the language used. But if He had said, with effect, to Peter on the night of the Arrest, "Rage, come thou out of him and enter into him no more," we should, I think, interpret it without postulating a separate entity for which Peter had no responsibility: He certainly speaks of "wisdom" and, on occasion, of "hand" and "eye" and "foot" in terms that suggest personality.

"Our Lord's language is completely in accordance with the religious and scientific ideas of His contemporaries. He acts recognizing fully what both the onlookers and those whom He cured would think. It is obvious that nothing else would have been possible on His part. . . . A religious teacher who in the first century of the Christian era adopted the scientific language and ideas of the present day would have talked in a language utterly incomprehensible to the people." (A. C. Headlam, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ*, p. 187.)

From a practical point of view, to the man who believed that a demon had taken possession of him the demon really existed; the belief itself was demon enough, and any intelligent healing treatment of him must take it into account. "Possessed" people themselves would, of course, be influenced by current opinions and would firmly believe that an evil spirit dwelt in them; in the same way as some unfortunate folk in America at the time of the "Cotton Mather" persecutions for witchcraft were convinced that they had the evil powers ascribed to them and confessed to all manner of sorceries with which they were charged.

We know as yet very little about such hypotheses

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as the "subliminal self," "secondary personality," "change of control," and so on. There is a vast field whose secrets are not made plain even to the modern psychologist and no dogmatizing is possible. Christ came to reveal religion, not psychology or medical science. He did not come to do away with the call for the best human effort, but rather to evoke it.

We may sum up tentatively by saying that the demonized of the New Testament were persons afflicted with especially severe diseases, either bodily or mental, for which the medical science of the day was at a loss to account: paralysis, blindness, deafness, dumbness, hysteria, epilepsy and mania all being included in this category. The current opinion was that demons had entered their bodies and, holding possession of them, not only afflicted them with evils, but dethroned the reason, usurping its place and using the afflicted to express themselves—much as an alleged "control" uses a modern spiritualistic medium. On this theory, cure would entirely depend on the expulsion of the alien demon, or, from our standpoint, on the persuasion of the sufferer and society that the demon had been expelled.

In modern medical practice sufferers of this type are sometimes curable by personal and emotional influences systematically brought to bear upon them over a prolonged period. They are not among the types so frequently (and carelessly) described as "neurotic" that are dealt with by "auto-suggestion," whether of the medical or Christian Scientist variety; nor do they furnish subjects



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readily amenable to modern methods of hypnotic suggestion. Such records as Dr. Morton Prince's *The Dissociation of a Personality* tell of prolonged, tentative, often disappointing work before normal conditions are restored. In the light of modern knowledge, even in the light of modern speculation, it is not possible to dispense easily with the word "miracle" in connection with the practically instantaneous cures effected by our Lord in an age when "psychology" was unheard of and unthought of. We may shape our guesses, may see a possible partial explanation in our tentative theories, but if we watch Him at work, for us, as for the congregation in the Capernaum synagogue, His authority stands unmatched, amazing.

Can we know anything of His method? As we think of Him quieting the man in the synagogue, humouring the Gerasene madman, talking with the woman of Phenicia, or discussing matters with the epileptic's father, we notice that He is by various ways seeking to awaken a new kind of attention in those for whom He works. Let us bracket this with the condition which He is continually insisting upon. Faith, He says, is the one condition needed, faith directed to the highest; faith of which God, as Jesus sees Him, is the object. In Christ Himself it is a faith of such divine quality that His thought of God can bring the reality of God to others so powerfully that symptoms of illness disappear. Without some answering faith in others He could not do His mighty works (Mk. 6. 5); even He was rendered powerless by unresponsiveness and lack of confidence. Is such faith

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present in all these cases? The possessed are described in terms that warrant us in agreeing that they suffer extreme anguish and self-despair (cf. the self-inflicted wounds of the Gerasene madman and the attempted self-destruction of the epileptic); and the very essence of "possession" is a consciousness of thralldom; the real self does not acquiesce, but an alien power is ruling in the high places of the soul; the sufferer is driven; sometimes it seems as if, in our parlance, the lower nature, animal instincts and desires have got the upper hand. Of this Christ Himself gives a complete diagnosis in the eerie parable of the unclean spirit (Matt. 12. 43-45); people who do not exercise self-control make an empty place in the personality and all sorts of instincts are released unbidden. Physically this fact is too often demonstrated: uncontrolled indulgences of desire, sins of the flesh such as gluttony, drunkenness and sexual lusts, do induce disorders and weaknesses of the nervous system, that special link between the soul and the body whose lesions have such lamentable consequences. Dr. Paul Dubois has pointed out that distinctions between faults of disposition, mental maladies, and physical disorders are really not possible. "At what degree do indecision, irritability, impressionability and emotional disturbances become sicknesses? . . . Where does disease branch out from the normal?" (*The Psychic Treatment of Nervous Disorders.*)

Behind the manifestation of the disorder we see now and then the sufferer himself; the sense of inarticulate misery, the yearning for deliverance is



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there; and this misery and longing is an unconscious faith that betterment is possible. Christ can and does take hold of this for the sufferer's relief.

Is it possible to probe a little further into the question of our Lord's own point of view? Attempts to explore the question of our Lord's own beliefs are in danger on the one hand of denying the sincerity of His incarnation as "truly man" and only permitting Him to be a "super-man" posing as a peasant, or on the other of denying the sincerity of His words as "perfectly God." To suggest that He acted as He did merely because that was the way to carry conviction to one who considered himself "possessed" is to forget that He did this for two children who had probably no theory about their own afflictions, and that one of them, the Syro-Phenician's daughter, was not present to be impressed in that way. In all ages people lose their self-control from various causes and to various degrees, but it is by no means characteristic of such people that they recognize that they have lost self-control.

Further, it may be questioned whether Jesus ever gave support to the idea that "demons" had anything in the nature of "human" personality. He "commanded" the demons, it is true; but we may "command" our dog or our horse without supposing the animal to possess the attribute of personality. The most we can surely say is that His method implies there are low forms of spiritual life able to injure the powers of the human spirit precisely as there are low forms of life we call germs able to injure the human body. It is not necessary

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to concede even that in order to accept the truth of these narratives.

“One is tempted to infer that the notion of possession was but the device of an unscientific age to account for the *appearance* of an oppressed will or personality exhibited in mental disease or in epileptic attacks in a marked degree, and in a less obtrusive manner in other ailments.” (A. B. Bruce, *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 179.)



## A DUMB (AND BLIND) DEMONIAC

(Matt. 9. 32, 33 ; 12. 22 ; Lk. 11. 14)

WE take this story next because it illustrates so well the vague way in which the popular mind explained affliction.

In Matt. 9. 32, 33 it is said :

“ There was brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb man spake.”

The same incident is recorded in Lk. 11. 14 ; the phraseology is slightly varied and makes it clear that the dumbness and the demonism refer, not to two distinct afflictions, but to one :

“ And he was casting out a devil which was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb man spake.”

In Matt. 12. 22 there is a similar case, with the additional affliction of blindness :

“ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb : and he healed him, insomuch that the dumb man spake and saw.”

It will be noticed that the second clause has no repetition of “ blind ” ; and that the first phrase takes us back to the statement in the ninth chapter, the adjective “ dumb ” being in the same relative position in Luke and in Matthew’s second story.

## A DUMB (AND BLIND) DEMONIAIC

Matthew (9. 32) and Luke (11. 14) certainly refer to the same occasion; and it is at least probable that the two Matthæan accounts, each with the same context, refer to one and the same occasion; there are, of course, other such "doublets" in his Gospel. All three accounts are followed by a remark on the crowd's astonishment and by the Pharisees' ascription of Jesus' power to demonic sources. In Luke and in Matthew's second account this leads up to Jesus's homely logic about the absurdity of Satan casting out Satan, His keen thrust, "By whom do your sons cast them out?" and the parable about attempting to break into the house of an armed strong man. This links Matthew's second account with Luke's story, which on the face of it is evidently the same as Matthew's first.

Nothing material is added by this incident to what we have already seen of our Lord's characteristic methods. The most interesting feature is the idea that blindness and dumbness are the result of "possession." The greater dramatic interest of other stories—possibly our own early associations with the word "devil"—call up a mental picture of a deranged person in connection with the word "demoniac." But here is a man who is quite normal, save that he has lost the faculty of speech, who is described as "devil-possessed." It is evidence of the tendency to ascribe ill-understood morbid conditions to demonic activity. We shall have occasion to refer to this again and again.

The ancients considered that inability to speak was the result of a "binding" of the tongue, either by magic spells or by some demon.



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In modern medical practice it has been recognized that there are cases of blindness, deafness and dumbness which are hysterical in their origin, and some such cases have proved amenable to the methods of psychotherapy. Blindness attributed to demonic agency is possibly akin to these cases of functional blindness. Many men became blind during the Great War as a result of poison-gas, or of explosions, or of concussions, though no actual damage to the mechanism of sight took place: in other words, the "blindness" was really an obsession—a suggestion of inability to see which had gained a footing in the consciousness at a time of extreme nervous and emotional strain, and which was strong enough to suspend the normal action of the vision mechanism. It is a similar result to that obtained in common hypnotic experiments when a suggestion that sugar is bitter causes the patient to experience an unpleasant taste and to make wry faces when it is really sugar he is taking. Careful re-education of the patient and persuasion that he can use his mechanism for seeing has resulted in many cures. In some cases the sight has returned, apparently "of itself,"—that is, the re-education has been the result of some unrecorded emotional processes, or has been unexpectedly achieved by a sudden shock or surprise.

In this story we have the bare statement that Jesus effected a cure by "expelling the demon"; if a modern practitioner said that his methods had been successful in "dispersing the obsession" the meaning would not be dissimilar. The almost universal belief of primitive man was that infirmities,

## A DUMB (AND BLIND) DEMONIAC

bodily or mental, were caused by evil spirits : in such an atmosphere the right method, answering to the patient's expectation, would be some form of exorcism by which the "spirit" was controlled and vanquished. Suppose that the cures of Jesus are eventually found to be in harmony with laws of mind and spirit that are as yet ill-defined or but little known, does it follow that His "mighty works" are no longer mighty, that they are "non-miraculous" after all? We have not explained how a Healer nigh two thousand years ago, without modern theories or methods, could speak a confident word, or suggest with a touch, and the patient recovered. The miracle is then the Doer, not the deed ; and we have still to account for Him.



## THE DEAF MAN WHO SPOKE WITH DIFFICULTY

(Mk. 7. 32-37)

THIS cure has some affinities with the foregoing and may be considered in connection with it. Mark alone relates how "a deaf man whose speech was almost unintelligible was brought to Jesus and He was asked to lay His hands upon him."

There is a brief but graphic description of the way in which our Lord dealt with this difficult case, difficult because his affliction produced an inevitable isolation of the sufferer and therefore stood in the way of effective sympathetic contact.

Jesus took him away from the crowd—so we read the word "privately"; He sympathized with the shyness of one who did not relish his friends' readiness to make a public exhibition of his infirmity: probably He realized that the man's reluctance generated an unconscious hostility to anything like interference with him in public, whether it was intended beneficently or no. When they were alone Jesus put his fingers into his ears and, having spat, touched his tongue; then, looking up to heaven, sighed deeply. This was a "conversation" with a deaf man conducted by dumb show, Jesus first conveying to him by signs His knowledge of and sympathy with his affliction. The man's attention and comprehension being secured, Jesus "looked up to heaven,"

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the obvious way of saying "God" to the deaf man, and then "sighed visibly"—a strong expression is used—thus conveying the sense of earnest prayer and entreaty to God, to whom his thought had been already directed.

Here was a man isolated in a very special degree from his fellows; his deafness had put him outside the little self-revealing things of daily fellowship, the casual talk about things in themselves indifferent that makes for mutual understanding and nearness, and the inflexions of tone and voice which convey so much of human affection in our ordinary family intercourse. Will not the upward look and the sigh reveal to the deaf man a sympathy that instinctively recognized his longings for release, though they have only been spoken in his soul to the ear of the Eternal? If consideration for his feelings, understanding of and sympathy with his affliction, interpretation of his private anguish and unavailing longings, can awaken a new sense of contact with God and of expectancy from Him, surely Jesus has directly touched these springs of the soul's life.

Psychology has proved that emotions do influence belief. It has given us some insight into the method by which our Lord rekindles desire, hope and faith in this deaf-mute. Arrived at this stage, the word of healing was spoken. It was a command to ears that could not hear, but the sympathy between the Healer and patient was real enough for the communication to be recognized and obeyed. "Ephphatha!"—Does not the Aramaic, preserved and translated for us by the evangelist, represent



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the deaf man's own story of the cure reaching its climax in the word that broke in upon the long silence, the first sound that had come to him for such a long time from the outside world?

"And his ears were opened and at once the bond of his tongue was loosened and he spoke properly."

Wünsch collected some thirty Attic tablets which give spells, or curses, to bind the tongue of an enemy. At their use he was expected to become dumb. Conversely, if a man's speech was affected in any way he was believed to be under some spell of malign influence, of sorcery, of witchcraft, or of demonic origin (cf. A. Deissmann, *Expository Times*, xviii. pp. 207 f.). This, then, is another instance of the idea of demonism as an explanation of ills whose actual origin was unknown.

There are several things to be learnt about the Master's methods from this cure. We gain from its details a vision of His unerring sympathy which shows the Healer as a friend Who knows one's inner mind: we see how understandingly He evokes confidence and arouses expectancy; how these supply the faith He seeks from the patient (so the faith itself is, in a way, His gift): we see, too, how He accommodates His methods to the patient's own mental outlook—the use of saliva, for instance, was a strong suggestion of healing about to happen; belief in its healing efficacy was very ancient, the idea being that it conveyed something of the personal qualities and powers of the one from whom it came. We are not concerned with the origin of this practice so much as with the fact that our Lord uses this popular belief to strengthen the faith

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and expectancy of one He is about to heal. It was a visible symbol of healing power to help the man's faith. But the faith was not allowed to rest there; it was lifted, as soon as it was aroused, to God as the source of all goodness and blessing.

The man was not born deaf, or he would have been a deaf-mute: he is described as "speaking with difficulty"; to translate this by "stammering" is to miss something of the fidelity of the report. Anyone who has had to do with people who have been "stone-deaf" for any length of time knows how frequently their speech is harsh and, since they cannot hear their own voice, sometimes becomes difficult to follow: which is exactly the condition this word describes.



## THE BLIND MAN OF BETHSAIDA

(Mk. 8. 22-26)

THIS is the story of another cure, of blindness this time, with details of method strikingly similar to those used in the preceding case, but adapted to another individual's need.

"They bring to him a blind man, and beseech him to touch him. And he took hold of the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village."

Popular confidence in the magical efficacy of the "touch" of an exceptional person should be noted; this has lingered long and may be recognized in the superstition about "touching for king's evil" (scrofula) which obtained in our own country as recently as the time of Queen Anne. Bethsaida, by the by, should not be described as a village; it was a fortified town; this is defective local knowledge on the part of Mark.

Jesus took the blind man outside the walls. This going for a walk with a new and interesting acquaintance is homely and human enough: it was prompted by the sympathy and wisdom of One with true healing instincts. The patient would be led to talk about himself and his history quite naturally; in this way mutual knowledge, understanding, and confidence would be established. When the intimacy was sufficiently ripe there was the appli-

## THE BLIND MAN OF BETHSAIDA

cation of saliva this time to the sightless eyes—and the laying on of hands (cf. Mk. 16. 18; Acts 28. 8), acts strongly suggestive of a cure. Then Jesus asked :

“Do you see anything?”

Recovering<sup>1</sup> his sight, he said, “I see men, for I see things I would take to be trees, but they are walking.”

We need not conclude that the attempt to cure the man was only partially successful; every oculist is cautious about the readmission of light to the retina after disuse or after treatment, and this gradual cure may indicate simply consideration for the long-disused mechanism of sight and a wise avoidance of the risk of suddenly subjecting it to the full glare of the sunlight. Once more Jesus “laid his hands upon the man’s eyes, and he looked through”—through our Lord’s fingers?—“and was restored and could see all things distinctly, even at a distance. And Jesus sent him to his house, saying, Do not go into the town.”

The man apparently lived at some outlying house, and perhaps this instruction was tantamount to prudent after-care—advising the man to keep indoors a bit until his eyes became thoroughly accustomed to the light. There is a similar instance of our Lord’s thoughtfulness for the future welfare of His patient in Mk. 5. 43.

These two stories, of the deaf man and of the blind man of Bethsaida, exhibit our Lord’s use of popular medical treatment, and display at greater

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ἀναβλέπω in Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*.



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length than usual His physician-like adaptation of treatment to individual cases. The use of saliva is interesting evidence that He was ready to adopt such methods as were prevalent or as were known to Him. It does not follow that He knew its efficacy was merely suggestive, or that He had any theory as to how it could be operative. People take and administer medicines and apply remedies, every day, simply because they are the accepted treatment and are known to be efficacious. They do this without troubling at all about their actual, detailed action. We do not infer that they hold wrong, or childish, opinions, or any opinions at all, about the way they operate. And our Lord may have acted in a precisely similar spirit.

Each story contains one of the frequent references to the "touch" of Jesus in His works of healing. Doubtless the fact of contact was of great importance psychologically for the patient; but it is scarcely possible to resist the feeling that in our Lord's case it was supremely an instinctive expression of His intense sympathy rather than a calculated attempt to produce a desirable emotion in His patient. The sympathy thus conveyed is a powerful agent in producing that expectant faith which is the goal of all the preliminary stages of the cures, as it is, according to Jesus, the express condition on which the means by which the beneficent activities of the Father's love can express themselves for the redemption of disused or disordered physical powers.

## BLIND BARTIMÆUS

(Matt. 20. 29-34; Mk. 10. 46-52; Lk. 18. 35-43)

THE accounts given in Mark and Luke are practically identical; in Matthew, however, *two* blind men are mentioned. He is combining this case with a reference to Mark's blind man of Bethsaida (on this feature of Matthew's plan of composition cf. p. 61 *supra*). The words which give the gist of the story are common to all three narratives:—

“Going . . . Jericho . . . crowd . . . blind . . . sitting by the roadside . . . heard that Jesus . . . Son of David, have mercy . . . rebuked . . . requiring that . . . shouted . . . Son of David, have mercy . . . Jesus, halting . . . What . . . do you want me to do . . . Jesus . . . and . . . renewed sight . . . and follow. . . .”

Mark alone gives the name Bartimæus. Possibly it is omitted in Matthew and Luke because of the way in which Mark records it. He has “the son of Timæus, Bartimæus” and this leaves it doubtful whether he is giving “Bartimæus” as the man's own name or as the Jewish equivalent of “the son of Timæus.”

There is some discrepancy in the accounts, as Luke places the incident at their entrance into Jericho, whilst Mark and Matthew equally definitely put it at their departure from the town. It is clear, however, that Bartimæus was a blind beggar



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found, as was likely enough, sitting begging outside the city gate. He was not a man who had always been blind, for his prayer was that he might recover his sight (see footnote, p. 99).

When told that Jesus of Nazareth was approaching he called out to Him: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Others present bade him be quiet, but he only shouted the more, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus halted and said, "Call him." Then they called the blind man, saying, "Take heart! Get up! He is calling you!" The blind man, putting on his coat,<sup>1</sup> jumped up and went to Jesus, Who asked him, "What do you wish me to do for you?" He replied, "That I may recover my sight, Rabbi."

(Matthew at this point says that Jesus "touched their eyes," which is evidently from Mk. 8. 25.)

Jesus told him to go his way; that his faith had given him healing. He followed Jesus; Luke adds that he was praising God.

The man's persistence was described by Jesus as faith, a faith which was the agency in his healing. All the evangelists agree that he became a follower of Jesus. Luke's statement that he glorified God because of his cure suggests that our Lord made it clear to him that it was faith in God which obtained the desired blessing. This inference is in harmony with the use of "faith" in the New Testament,

<sup>1</sup> The Sinaitic-Syriac version requires ἀπολαβών in place of ἀποβαλόν, and this seems correct. The beggar sitting in the sun without his abbas, puts it on as a mark of respect before approaching Jesus. Mrs. Smith-Lewis had a similar experience on entering into conversation with some Syrian labouring folk.

## BLIND BARTIMÆUS

where the object of faith is always a person, usually Christ, or God through Christ.

Like the previous story this has to do with *recovery* of sight, an experience of which there have been many cases among soldiers who lost their sight through shell-shock and recovered it through some sudden occurrence, emotional or other, or by psychic methods of treatment. Possibly the love and sympathy of which so many became conscious when Jesus was near them had an emotional therapeutic effect of such a nature. If the "passing by" of Jesus could so beneficially affect blindness, it was our Lord Himself who was the miracle.



## THE MAN BORN BLIND

(Jn. 9. 1-41)

THIS story is recorded, with the controversy it illustrates, as one of the evangelist's few, carefully selected "signs." Its appropriateness for the doctrinal purpose with which it is related is evident.

John's aim in writing his Gospel is very clearly explained by himself, and he subordinates his narrative to this purpose—"that ye may believe" (Jn. 20. 31)—throughout. He tells the story of a miracle that people may have faith: he is therefore but little concerned with the *method* of the healing and has little or nothing to say about antecedent requirements of faith by our Lord, or of any conditions upon which or means whereby the healing efficacy was mediated. But whilst this is true, John's narratives often contain the minute details which mark the testimony of one who saw the event he describes, and his interpretation of the mind and spirit of his Master is always of value. He affords more help for the study of the Healer than of the healing, of the Worker than of the wonder wrought, and his comment upon Christ's motive, as it appeared to one who had been present and had for long meditated upon the scenes in which he had participated is often of considerable importance.

The scene of this story is in Jerusalem, and John

## THE MAN BORN BLIND

recalls the conversation prior to the cure. The man was known to have been blind from birth and the disciples raised the question of responsibility: Was it his sin, or his parents' sin, that caused this man to be born blind? It is the familiar Jewish, and pagan, idea of suffering as a result of sin against the gods (cf. Lk. 13. 4; and note the curious coincidence that both events are connected with Siloam). Christ does not say *here* that the belief is erroneous; He merely dismisses it as not the true solution in this particular case. To infer from this blind man's story that Christ endorsed the theory because He did not dispute it, but only set it aside, will lead to a distorted vision of His purpose in works of healing. Christ prefers on this occasion to consider the purpose the man's affliction now serves.

The method of cure is interesting. Clay was made from the dust with saliva. The use of dust is a sort of primitive homœopathy, for dust is the most obvious irritant which causes eye-trouble and discomfort; saliva, as we have seen, was regarded as curative in its properties, particularly so, in the ancient pharmacopœia, for the eyes. His eyes sealed with the clay, the man was bidden to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. His act of obedience was also an act of faith, and we are on familiar ground in this requirement; it is the faith, not the washing, which is essential (cf. the story of Naaman and Elisha). An ordinary remedy was selected, but here it was given a success beyond its supposed powers.

The man returned home able to see. John



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narrates the subsequent conflict with the authorities, arising out of the breach of Sabbath observance ("It was on the Sabbath day that Jesus made the clay," v. 14). A significant point in the man's examination is his astonishment at the attitude of the authorities, for it was well accepted that such works were of divine authority (cf. the testimony of Nicodemus, Jn. 3. 2). Jesus' subsequent use of the cure to lead the man into a fuller sense of the love and revelation of God is recorded in vv. 36-38: it is Himself that He gives; it is the faith He elicits which make the love of God a reality, and the motive of a new and heartfelt worship.

## THE WOMAN WITH "A SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY"

(Lk. 13. 10-17)

LUKE has two accounts of cures whose chief interest is connected with the Sabbath controversy. The first is this healing of a woman. The scene is vaguely stated to be in "one of the synagogues" and the president of the synagogue is the spokesman of the Sabbatarian party. The patient is described as a "woman having a spirit of weakness for eighteen years" (Moffatt translates "who suffered weakness from an evil spirit") "who was bent double and absolutely unable to raise herself into an erect posture."

Cases of nerves refusing to do their work and of consequent muscular contraction, are not uncommon in medical practice: the trouble originates in some form of hysteria.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the physician-evangelist speaks of this as an example of possession (cf. on this Lk. 4. 39); it is an indication

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Macalister, however, regards this as a case of surgical disease—chronic osteitis of the vertebrae, a common result of agricultural labour (*v. Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, iii. 328). The ascription of the condition to demons makes a nervous origin more probable, and instant recovery more reasonable.



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that the medical science of the day could find no known cause for the ailment. He does not, however, say anything about exorcism being used. He tells us that Jesus noticed her in the synagogue and called out to her, "Woman, you are set free from your weakness," and followed His announcement by the imposition of His hands. "Instantly she became erect, and praised God." Another example is given here of healing by the transference of power through physical contact, which is a characteristic of the popular ideas of Christ's time.

The method of cure was a strong assurance accompanied by a sympathetic contact sensibly conveying it to the nervous system of the patient. Probably we have not the full record of Jesus' conversation with the woman, for the story is obviously a *précis* and is introduced because of its bearing on the ritual dispute. We may suppose that His teaching in the synagogue had prepared the way for the cure to be illustrative of His words, for the evangelist reports that immediately she ascribed her recovery to God. This is characteristic of our Lord's teaching (cf. p. 102 and Lk. 8. 39).

Jesus defended His "breach" of Sabbath law by an appeal to acts that were allowable, contending that they justified Him in freeing "a daughter of Abraham, bound by Satan these eighteen years" (on "bondage" cf. p. 96). The argument is that by healing this deformed woman a demonic chain was broken, which was a divine work. Recalling once more the current theory of disease as a result of sin, it is interesting to note how this interpretation harmonizes with the more modern philosophy

## WOMAN WITH "SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY"

of life. Acts of defiance to the laws of health, whether consciously or unconsciously committed, do involve men in the physical and other consequences of the chain of events thus set up, which constitute a real bondage.



## THE MAN WITH DROPSY

(Lk. 14. 1-6)

THE companion picture to the healing of the infirm woman is the healing of the man suffering from dropsy. Again it is the Sabbath; religious officials are present; and the story seems to imply that the sufferer's presence was due to a prearranged plot, and a deliberate attempt was made to provoke Jesus into an actionable breach of Sabbath observance.

He argued with them, appealing to their own practice, that deeds of charity, succour, and love take precedence of ritual law.

We are merely told that Jesus took hold of the man—that is, sympathetic contact was a feature in the healing—cured him, and sent him away.

As in the case of the woman, the importance of the miracle to Luke is that it illustrates and drives home Christ's teaching about the Sabbath. It is clear that to the evangelists there was more to be wondered at in our Lord's attitude to conventional religious observance than in the cures wrought. Whilst many of the stories of miracle furnish material for a truer view of the supremacy of the spiritual interpretation of life, we may not neglect this fact that, for His contemporaries, the all-important lesson of some of these incidents was the overriding of a ritual and ceremonial interpretation

## THE MAN WITH DROPS

of religion in the interests of a larger religious appropriation of divine love. Perhaps if we could identify ourselves more completely with the point of view of some of His earliest followers we should see that they found greater cause for astonishment in the fact that One so obviously sincere and holy, who had lived in such real fellowship with God, should so often put aside as of but little consequence those traditional observances which were so bound up with their religious life that they had become a religion in themselves.



## THE SICK MAN AT BEZATHA POOL

(Jn. 5. 1-16)

THIS narrative reproduces in the fourth Gospel the Sabbath-healing controversy which is so frequently stressed in the Synoptics.

Modern exploration of the sites in Jerusalem has yielded evidence that goes to confirm John's accuracy of description in details of place and time. "Bezatha," the best reading of the name, is equivalent to "New Town," a district of north-east Jerusalem, according to the maps. In 1889 excavations in this area revealed a pool with five shallow arches on its north side, under the floor of an old crypt. Professor Rendel Harris has compared the idea of the "moving of the waters" with the universal folk-lore of the New Year, and finds in "first foot" customs and water "rain charms," which are of almost universal extent, a basis for the contemporary ideas about this pool, and also for supposing that the unidentified "feast" was the Jewish "Feast of the New Year," *i. e.*, in the month of September.

The casual statement in v. 13 that the healed man did not know the name of his healer is just one of those touches which mark the narrator of an actual incident, for it is the sort of detail that would never occur to one drawing from imagination.

## THE SICK MAN AT BEZATHA POOL

Our Lord's sudden question, "Do you want to be made well?" is unusual. The invalid's explanation of his long affliction followed by an abrupt command<sup>1</sup> obediently fulfilled, does not tell us much about symptoms or method of cure. John leaves us to infer that the man was healed by the faith inspired by the presence and attitude of Jesus. Verse 14 says that at a subsequent meeting Jesus warned the man against sin, "lest something worse should happen" to him.

The quality of faith required by Jesus seems to vary very considerably in individual cases; and it is elicited in different ways. For one intercessor a cure may be "telepathed" to a distant sufferer without anything more than an assurance, for another patient there is quite a course of sympathetic treatment; for one, the presence of Jesus suffices; for another, His touch; for another, His garment's hem; for the paralytic, forgiveness; for this man, caution against sin.

Obviously, John's purpose is to give some explanation of the nature of the Sabbath controversy and to show that Jesus in all His works of mercy is revealing God the Father (v. 19). The lesson is taught by a demonstration, and the demonstration is here recorded by a scholar who had learned the lesson and is more concerned to pass it on than to recall all the steps of the demonstration. "He came that they might have abundant life," and He mediated it by bringing men into touch with God as the source of life.

<sup>1</sup> Almost identical in phrase with that addressed to the paralytic at Capernaum; cf. Mk. 2. 9.



## PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Matt. 8. 14, 15; Mk. 1. 29-31; Lk. 4. 38, 39)

MARK's "specimen Sabbath" in Capernaum, with which his account of the Galilean ministry opens, prepares for the Sabbath controversy by giving two cures on that day, one in the synagogue and a second at Peter's house, other disciples also being present.

Mark says that Simon's mother-in-law when they reached the house was prostrated and "in a fever." Our corresponding colloquialism is "had a temperature." Matthew follows this, though he uses another word to describe the prostration; she is "thrown down," as it were, by the disease. Luke uses more medical terminology,<sup>1</sup> describing her as suffering from a "great" as distinguished from a "lesser" fever. Simon and the others at once "consult"—so Luke; Mark has "tell"—Jesus about her, which suggests that the attack had come on unexpectedly; perhaps since they had left the house. It may have been of a malarial nature, for

<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that too much stress is laid upon the use of technical terms by Luke; that the terms were not, as in our medical vocabulary, coined for the purpose of technical description, but were the real, everyday names for the things described. But the broad distinction between the "colloquial" Greek of the Syrian peasantry used by Matthew and Mark and the "correct" usage of the medical profession of Luke is undoubtedly noticeable. See Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*.

## PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

malaria was not uncommon in the lakeside towns. Jesus—Luke depicts Him as standing over the patient's bedside in a truly professional manner—healed her by a touch (so Matthew), roused her, taking her hand (Mark).

The suddenness with which we reach the end of the story need not preclude her from any share in the conversation which took place before the healing; nor need it suggest the absence of any spoken word on Christ's part. Luke says that Jesus did speak, and "rebuked" the fever. This, we remember, is the technical word for exorcising a demon; and it is regarded by some as evidence that Luke was not so "scientific" in his account of treatment as he is usually credited with being. Such criticism is two-edged. "Fever" is a general term for the symptom of heightened temperature which accompanies a great many forms of disease, owing to the disturbance of the circulatory system they cause. Changes of body-temperature are frequently effected by the nervous condition of individuals. Dr. Hadfield has reported a change of over twenty degrees registered by the thermometer in a patient's hand occurring in some twenty minutes, due solely to repeated suggestions to the patient (not under hypnosis) of a gradually rising temperature. So that Luke's description of a cure achieved by "rebuke," or, to follow Dr. Hadfield, by "telling the temperature to go down," may not be so unscientific after all.

"The fever left her at once and she ministered to them." This was cure, not convalescence. But its suddenness and completeness are not quite so



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inexplicable as they seem. Malaria, in its commonest form of "country fever" or ague, may come on in the midst of good health: a feeling of chill and violent cold-sensations—teeth chattering, fingers dead white, pinched features, a rise of five or six degrees above normal in the body temperature—are the first stage. Dry heat, burning thirst, the usual intellectual unfitness or confusion of the feverish state, mark the second stage, and are followed by the perspiration stage, with a return to normal temperature. The paroxysm may complete this cycle in three or four hours, but is usually longer in temperate climates. When it has passed there is "a fair degree of bodily comfort and fitness" (cf. article, "Malaria," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, xvii. 462a).

## THE WOMAN WITH HEMORRHAGE

(Matt. 9. 20-22; Mk. 5. 25-34; Lk. 8. 43-48)

THE scene of this happening was a street in Capernaum: the president of the local synagogue had sought the immediate help of Jesus because his little daughter lay at the point of death and a miscellaneous crowd was following them to the house. With this crowd a woman mingled unnoted; she was suffering from a distressing malady which physicians to-day call *menorrhagia*, and it had been chronic for the past twelve years.

The levitical law made the status of such a sufferer extremely painful. Ceremonially, she was impure, and was not only cut off from all religious associations, but was forbidden under penalties to come into any contact with her fellows. Mark relates her desperate efforts after a remedy: she

“had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.”

Naturally, this frank reflection on the medical profession of the day is not found in Luke. He paraphrases it by saying “she was not strong enough to be healed by anyone,” which rather neatly implies that it was the patient’s inability to rally, not the doctors’ inability to cure, that was at fault.



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She, "having heard of Jesus," came behind Him in the throng and touched His clothing.

All three evangelists note the surreptitious approach and the touch: Matthew and Luke say that it was the sacred tassel (*zizith*, cf. Num. 15. 38) of His robe that she touched. Her desperate earnestness must be observed: in the very presence of the chief local religious dignitary she risked the serious consequences of detection; she mixed with other people, and set out to touch a fellow-creature's garments. There was the true adventurous spirit in this poor creature, that readiness to risk hindrances and rebuffs from others and possible unpleasant personal consequences which is an essential characteristic of people with a living faith working within them.

Mark, followed by Matthew, explains that she believed—"said within herself" is their phrase—she would be cured if she could but touch His garments. There was no risk, no uncertainty about Jesus, whatever treatment from others she might have to face. The superstition that magical virtue attaches to a person's clothing is found in many forms: the significant point is not that virtue is supposed to be in clothing, but that it is in the clothing of a person of remarkable rank or special sanctity. Her "superstition" had at its heart a great faith in the character of Christ.

She touched and was healed without the conscious co-operation of Jesus. But not without His knowledge. Mark describes Him as "perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth." Taken too literally this would reduce

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the miracle to the merest magic. It is a simple way of stating that in Christ was spiritual power, available for healing, and that it was made effective by the patient's faith. The phrase is also a graphic way of stating the psychical sensitiveness of Jesus: we need only recall the many evidences of His ready understanding of the needs of men and women around Him, of His intense sympathy with their needs, to recognize the truth of this bit of portraiture. Does it require some theory of the supernatural power of Jesus to explain this? There are many experiences—quite apart from "travellers' tales"—coming within the wide and but little explored field of telepathy which suggest that the explanation of our Lord's "awareness" is possibly not in any supernatural theory, but in the perfection of His human sensitiveness to His environment. Little children and the pure in heart are apt to have extraordinarily keen intuitions.

Our Lord's question reveals the naturalness and the "human-ness" of the situation: He sought to know who it was that had touched Him. The disciples remonstrated with Him for such a question when the crowd was jostling them on all sides in the narrow street. "Jesus looked round to see *her* that had done this thing." It is, perhaps, straining a point, yet Mark *is* giving, even if unconsciously, a tribute to a nature so finely responsive that it sensed the intentional touch of the *woman* as something distinct from the multifarious, unintentioned contacts of the crowd.

At His question she came forward, "fearing and trembling," for she knew herself guilty of a ritual



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crime, to make her full confession at His feet, "right before all the people"—it is Luke who notes thus her courage and its cost. Jesus at once reassured her, addressing her kindly as "Daughter." There is a whole revelation of Jesus in that word if we remember that it came from a Jew to an unclean woman who has touched His garments, thereby infecting Him in the eyes of His co-religionists.

"Thy faith has made thee well." Not "thy touch," or "My power," nor even "God's power"; but, simply, "*thy* faith." Jesus, then, regarded faith as a cause which had a uniform result: He was calmly certain of God's response to human confidence. This is a belief in a final uniformity of law, not in an arbitrary God: for Christ there is no division of "natural" and "supernatural": God is One; and He is love. The law is universal and can be relied on at all times and in all needs.

The little dialogue makes it plain why the Master did not allow her to go on her way, unperceived, with the stolen blessing. He had to give her a better root for her confidence and for her future well-being than any mere momentary contact could ensure. Faith had made her well; and a like faith would keep her from any future recurrence of her malady.

## THE PARALYTIC AT CAPERNAUM

(Matt. 9. 1-8; Mk. 2. 1-12; Lk. 5. 18-26)

THE three accounts of the paralytic man brought to the house contain much of a common tradition; there are some omissions and abbreviations in Matthew, and some curious verbal changes in Luke that we shall have occasion to note.

The chief interest in the story as it is presented in the Gospels is not so much centred on the healing as on the controversy which it aroused. There is also introduced, as a very real issue, the nature of the connection between sin and suffering.

Mark definitely places the occurrence at Capernaum; Matthew calls it "his own city," and Luke's account leaves us free to infer that Capernaum is the scene. Jesus was "at home," and a crowd had gathered at the house to listen to His teaching; among them, says Luke, were many religious officials. Matthew says nothing about the house or the crowd or the difficulties of approach which the friends of the paralytic had to overcome. Mark tells us that the four men who brought him were unable to get near to Jesus because of the crowd, so went up to the roof of the house and "uncovered the roof where He was; and, having dug through it, lowered the mattress on which the paralytic lay."

This picture belongs to a peasant's house; its flat roof, accessible by an outer stair, is made of clay



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or earth rolled hard over the layers of reed or brush-wood which cover its main joists. There is probably the usual qafa'a, or opening, by which stores after being spread out and sun-dried are lowered into the house. This opening they enlarged so as to let down their helpless friend on his mattress, or sleeping-mat, by means of which they had brought him thither.

Luke says they tried vainly to carry him inside and then had recourse to the roof from which they removed the tiles. He is evidently visualising a house of Greco-Roman pattern and supposes the people gathered in its inner court or atrium. Possibly he is adapting his language to Gentile readers to avoid an elaborate explanation which would encumber the course of his narrative.

All the evangelists agree that in the eyes of Jesus the significant thing about the sufferer's comrades was their faith. Their determination to get to Him somehow or other was spiritual in its origin and afforded a spiritual atmosphere which He was quick to sense and appreciate. Whether or no the sick man is included in "their," the faith is corporate in its quality. This social quality of faith needs to be noted; it is in the New Testament that this emerges. "Our faith is faith in someone else's faith; and in the greatest matters this is most the case" (Wm. James). Faith is not so much a difficult lesson to be learnt as a contagion to be caught. It has an infectious quality. There are inferences to be drawn from this as to the conditions of spiritual healing (cf. Matt. 8. 15; Ja. 5. 15).

An unexpected factor is the first word of our

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Lord. Affectionately addressing the man He said, "My child, your sins are forgiven." We do not know whether any conversation with the sick man called forth this absolution: or whether previous knowledge of the man's history, or an instinctive intuition of Christ's lies behind it. Nor do we know whether his sins were the cause of his disease. Any of these things are possible, of course; but we do not know of any one of them as facts. It is at least reasonable to suppose that his sickness and enforced inaction had served to bring his sins home to him, and that he shared the popular notion as to a necessary connection between sin and suffering (cf. Jn. 9. 2). It may be that his affliction lay heavy upon him because he took it to be an indication that he was a very grievous sinner. A man's spiritual condition has much to do with his mental and physical condition.

Now the mentality of the afflicted man is a factor to be reckoned with in any diagnosis which aims at effecting his cure. And we must recognize again the almost universal belief of the time that there was an ever-present army of spiritual beings, some good, some evil, continually exercising their influence over mankind. The evil spirits were considered largely responsible for the sins, sorrows and sufferings of the human race. This kingdom of evil is something over against and in conflict with the Kingdom of God. Therefore the Christ would cure by abolishing the work of evil spirits and driving them forth from their strongholds.

"In one respect alone have the miracles recorded by the (New Testament writers) a more real ground than the mass



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of miracles of which we have the relation. Medical science has never gauged—never perhaps enough set itself to gauge—the intimate connection between moral fault and disease. To what extent or in how many cases what is called *illness* is due to moral springs having been used amiss—whether by being over-used or by not being used sufficiently—we hardly at all know, and we far too little enquire. Certainly it is due to this very much more than we commonly think; and the more it is due to this, the more do moral therapeutics rise in possibility and importance. The bringer of light and happiness, the calmer and pacifier, the invigorator and stimulator, is one of the chiefest of doctors. Such a doctor was Jesus, such an operator, by an efficacious and real, though little observed and little employed agency.” (M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, p. 62, R.P.A. reprint.)

Jesus in His healings dealt with each individual case and met the sufferer's personal need. In this case our Lord's first care was the sick soul. In this case; but by no means in all. Elsewhere He expressly teaches that physical evil is not all the result of sin. His absolution shocked the religious authorities present. They did not interpret it as a claim to Messiahship, but saw in it an arrogance that was blasphemous. He was usurping a prerogative that belonged to God alone. They did not openly criticize: it was among themselves, perhaps merely in their own minds and not actually expressed or discussed. Jesus immediately divined the hostility and took up the unspoken challenge. He was conscious that He spoke with authority, and, that they might know it to be so, He turned to the paralytic and said, “Rise! Take up your pallet and go home.” And the man obeyed Him.

The healing, then, was a symbol of the reality of the divine forgiveness; not something done in

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support of Christ's claim to forgive sins, but as establishing the reality of the forgiveness. The miracle does not "prove" the teaching; it is the teaching. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases"—a true revelation of God, a real evangel, calls for both.

Paralysis (cf. "fever") is a symptom rather than a disease: it is the result either of an injury of the nervous or muscular system or of disturbance of the motor centres of the brain. The latter form is usually described as "functional motor-paralysis." Sometimes its sudden cure has been effected by shock: the familiar tale of the bedridden old lady who ran downstairs on an alarm of fire is an example. In Canon Streeter's symposium on *The Spirit* (pp. 30 ff.) an interesting case is given by Dr. Hadfield of a British soldier who returned from the Italian front completely paralysed in both legs. Sympathetic reconstruction of his experience suggested that his sense of duty had been in conflict with the emotions of the surrounding panic of retreat, and that this, coupled with the fatigues of the campaign, had produced the motor-disturbance or "mental-complex" responsible for his condition. Acting upon this hypothesis, it was found that his symptoms were amenable to suggestion and soon disappeared, so that the man became entirely normal.

Possibly in this New Testament instance the morbid condition was induced by the man's conviction that his sin had incurred God's anger and drawn down upon him this affliction. If so, we can understand the *rationale* of our Lord's procedure



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which first counteracts the despair and so cures the malady proceeding from it.

But any account of a twentieth-century cure, effected experimentally, on a tentative hypothesis as to mental causes, can only serve to throw into more startling relief the uniqueness of One who could at once divine and heal in the first century of our era a case that was, perhaps, of a similar nature. Thirty years ago Dr. Hadfield's cure would have been received with considerable scepticism by the general public and by men of his own profession. We have here a record, which is good history, of a cure effected nearly two thousand years ago. If the modern instance permits us to think that it was achieved, not by overriding "laws of nature," but by an unerring knowledge of their action in so difficult a realm, we must walk with some humility in any attempt to know One Who so manifestly transcends our knowledge.

## THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND

(Matt. 12. 9-14; Mk. 3. 1-6; Lk. 6. 6-11)

IN this second story of a cure of paralysis the chief interest of the evangelists is in the Sabbath controversy which it aggravated. Our Lord's anger at the callousness of the ritualists, frankly recorded by Mark, is omitted in Matthew and Luke: perhaps they did not realize that it was essentially a revelation of the depth of His sympathy with suffering, and of His conviction that it was not the will of a Heavenly Father that one of His little ones should suffer.

There is nothing about the method of the healing save the two commands given to the disabled man; but it is possible to recognize something of what the method was by the implications of those commands. First, the man was bidden to stand out in the midst of the congregation. Jesus then, apparently, turned to discuss with the hostile section of the gathering; but, whatever may be the concern of the chroniclers, we may be sure that His chief concern was the man himself. The Master's questions which silenced the opposition though they did not satisfy it, would arouse a spirit of expectancy in the cripple. His hand was useless; muscles were atrophied because the nerves no longer conveyed to them the impulse of the controlling will. It was his hand, yet no longer his; for it had ceased to obey, and he was



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quite unable to perform movements that were once done without a conscious thought and almost without an effort. As the Master spoke of "doing good" and of "saving life," wonder and perhaps a gleam of hope quickened in him. He was, all the time, being prepared for the second command, "Stretch out your hand." Had this word been given suddenly and without this unconscious preparation he might, and probably would, have met it with a mental objection. It was a command to do the very thing that was impossible for him; other people, of course, who had the full use of their limbs never could understand: if this Healer did not realize his inability and proposed to make the impossible thing a condition of his healing, then it was clear that healing was impossible. But this new prophet had such a new point of view: whilst he stood there and heard Jesus speak about God's will and purpose, emotions long asleep stirred within him. He watched the eyes that looked so searchingly into men's hearts, and listened to a voice that rang true, with never a note of doubt or hesitancy; and when the speaker turned to him, looked him steadily in the face and said, "Stretch out your hand," these new emotions crystallized into a sudden new impulse. It was the impulse to obey. Which is faith. And with it came the power to obey more perfectly. He stretched it out, and his hand was quite restored. (Some such reconstruction of the incident was suggested by W. W. Holdsworth, in *The Expository Times*, xix. 215.) The thing which had been impossible before was instinctively recognized to be possible when Jesus told him to do it. It was

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not a question of a new way of thinking about his disability: he simply knew without any thinking about it that Jesus was One Who did not ask for impossibilities to be done: that for Him there were no impossibilities because one could count on God.

The cure left the critics unconvinced and angry. There had been no act to which they could attach an accusation of Sabbath-breaking: Jesus had not even laid a hand upon the sufferer. They were the more deeply dissatisfied and discussed how they should proceed against this irregular and dangerous teacher.

We add this to the lengthening list of healings in which faith is the active agent as one in which we gain some slight hint of the way in which it is awakened. We let our imagination cast back across the centuries and look upon the man whose right hand hangs limp and helpless by his side; we think of his shrivelled sinews and impotent nerves. He is centuries too soon for men to talk to him hopefully of local stimulation and to encourage him with strange beams of light focussed on the useless member or with wonderful apparatus that discharges its thrilling, tingling currents of electricity. Standing as he does in that far-off day nothing but a miracle can restore that lost faculty: in the warfare between Love and disease for such a case the only available weapons are not material but spiritual. Jesus steps into the canvas of our picture; and with His advent new emotions are astir in the man's soul. As the writer to the Hebrews says, He is the author of the faith whose response He requires for the effectiveness



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of those spiritual powers by which Love wrought its miracles.

Jesus was ever showing how ready God was to bestow love, self-control, health, forgiveness, in response to faith. To say what faith means is not easy; but whatever the complete definition may be, faith largely consists in a true estimate of the qualities of a person, and determining one's attitude to that person in accordance therewith. It need not be a high estimate but it must be a true estimate for faith to find a basis. We learn in the unconscious reliance on others which infancy requires the essence of it; and in maturer years we are rarely able to reckon the extent of our faith in others—only in moments of stress do we discover how much or how little we trust them. Nor is our faith in God other in kind; it is called forth by our idea of His personal qualities; it depends upon the estimate we form of His character; it is the view we take of God, and if the eye is single the whole body will be full of light; there will be a true estimate of God's love and will for man. Such an estimate or faith which knits man's purpose to the purpose of God and knits the purpose of each man to that of his fellows is invincible strength.

## THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

(Matt. 8. 5-13; Lk. 7. 1-10)

MATTHEW says that this was a case of paralysis in an acutely painful form; Luke simply says that the man was very ill and at death's door. There are no confirmatory details which enable us to say what modern malady Matthew means by the vague "paralysed": it might apply to any form of illness which made the sick man incapable of his accustomed activity; it might indicate any "loosening" of the power of self-command, or any "disable-ment." As the story is not found in Mark we may assume that it comes from that second source which furnished so much of the new material common to Matthew and Luke.

Both accounts agree that at Capernaum there was a centurion who had a slave seriously ill. The words "boy" and "slave" are both used by both evangelists; the former might mean a son, but does not necessarily imply any relationship and is probably used in much the same way as it is applied in South Africa to Kaffir servants. Matthew's story opens with the approach of the centurion to Jesus and his request for the Master's aid. Luke's story seems to begin at an earlier stage of the incident altogether: he says that the centurion, having heard about Jesus, sent some Jewish elders to ask Him to come and



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heal his servant, and that they did this, urging the good feeling of the centurion towards Judaism and his local benefactions as a reason why Jesus should meet his wishes. Jesus consented and set out with them. It is noteworthy that at this early stage in our Lord's Galilean mission belief in His healing power was already so general that a Roman army officer was quite convinced of its genuineness.

On the way they were met by men with a message from the centurion. In Luke's story he never comes face to face with Jesus; we cannot "harmonize" the two reports in their details therefore. This "message" is the same in form and substance as the personal reply which Matthew has reported that the centurion gave to our Lord's offer to come and heal his servant. In effect, the centurion courteously recognized that a strict Jew would incur ceremonial defilement by entering a pagan household and suggested that it would be sufficient if Jesus gave an order for the man's recovery. He instanced himself as a man with delegated authority which produced obedience in them over whom it was exercised, and evidently regarded Jesus as having at His command and disposal spiritual agents who can control physical conditions.

This is one of the few occasions on which Matthew permits himself to record the human emotion of surprise as evinced by our Lord. He is surprised at a faith which surpassed anything He had experienced among His compatriots (Matthew's 11th and 12th verses are to be found in Luke, but on another occasion with a quite different context; see Lk. 13. 28, 29). Jesus assured the officer that his request was

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granted, and he returned to find that his servant was cured "at that very hour."

Luke says that the messengers made the statement about delegated authority on the centurion's behalf and that Jesus expressed His surprise at it, but he says nothing of any word of assurance or of any command to return; he simply says that they did return and found the servant well.

The very considerable narrative divergence can only be explained as indicative of the freedom with which the respective compilers of these two Gospels handled their material.

As in the case of the Syro-Phenician woman's daughter—in which the "great faith" of another Gentile intercessor moved Jesus to remark upon it—this healing was wrought at a distance. There was no personal or delegated contact between the Healer and the patient; the cure was, as it were, "telepathed" to the sick man. Such a healing is without any authentic parallel in modern medicine; but it is not without analogies among those who claim to effect cures by "psychical" means and make use of "absent treatment." Reference may be made to the cure of the Syro-Phenician's child and to the case of the palsied man at Capernaum; in both instances the faith of others has a contagious healing efficacy.



## THE NOBLEMAN'S SON

(Jn. 4. 46-54)

THIS miracle is very closely analogous to the cure of the centurion's servant; many consider it to be another version of the same story. The problem is not an easy one; it is complicated by the considerable differences in the presentment of the story given by Matthew and Luke, and it seemed fairer for the moment to deal with those two stories without any reference to John's story. Now that story is before us, we must note the points of possible similarity and of dissimilarity and consider if there is sufficient evidence to determine the relations, if any, between the nobleman's son and the centurion's servant.

As we must always recognize when we pass from the Synoptic Gospels to the fourth Gospel, John has an avowed special purpose which he keeps steadily in view; his account is clearly coloured by his own reflections and temperament; at times he handles his material freely for doctrinal purposes. On the other hand he scatters through his narratives details, minute details, which give the impression of a personal memory of scenes and events: now and again he assumes the existence of other records well known to his readers and seems, by the exactness and particularity with which some point not

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necessary to his main purpose is emphasized, to be quietly correcting errors or misstatements in them. The whole problem, at the present day, calls for suspended judgment rather than dogmatic conclusions. We may wisely confine ourselves to taking such facts as he gives and considering whether they afford any additional help for our study of the method and purpose of Christ in His actions.

Cana is particularly mentioned as the scene of interview for the story narrated in the fourth Gospel. John says that a king's officer went there—"nobleman" is rather a misleading translation—to find Jesus and ask Him to come to his son who was lying at the point of death in Capernaum.

This gives us several apparent differences, and some possible links, with the Synoptic story. The Synoptists tell of a "centurion"; but a centurion might also be a "king's officer," in the same way as a legionary can be described as a soldier of Herod's guard (cf. Mk. 6. 27). Cana is not Capernaum; neither site can be identified with certainty, but they were somewhere about twelve miles apart; while John connects the occurrence with Cana, and Matthew and Luke give Capernaum, John says the sick person was at Capernaum. The centurion came on behalf of his servant, or house-slave; the king's officer was interceding for his son. A son would, of course, be a "boy," but a "boy" does not necessarily mean a son (*v. supra*, p. 131). It has been noted that Matthew and Luke speak of a "boy" and agree that he was a slave: John's story is definitely about a son; but in v. 49 the



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father speaks of him as "my boy," using the ambiguous word of the Synoptic story.

There is no comment in the fourth Gospel on the faith of a Gentile; the only comment of Christ puts the request in an unfavourable light—"Except ye see signs and wonders ye will in no wise believe." This seems to imply an unwillingness on the part of Jesus to interfere; for a similar appearance of unwillingness we may compare the story of the Syro-Phenician woman. The officer repeated his request with an added note of urgency, upon which Jesus told him to return home and that his son would live. Believing this word, he set out and was met on the way by some of his servants with the news of recovery. This meeting of the officer by his servants echoes, but with a difference, Luke's version with its account of the centurion's friends who met Jesus *en route* (cf. Lk. 7. 10). The father asked the servants—

"the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth."

As with the centurion, faith procured healing at a distance for a third person; but in John's story the faith followed upon the assurance; though the man's coming several miles to see Jesus and solicit His help was an act of faith—not faith of a very high order if v. 48 is taken as an expression of our Lord's opinion of it.

In the servants' reply to the father, it comes out, quite casually, that the son's ailment was a "fever"

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(v. 53). In Matthew the trouble is "paralysis" of a vague nature; Luke does not commit himself to any particular illness, only to its seriousness, which is a feature common to all the stories. There would be points of similarity between a malarial fever and the disorder known as "shaking palsy"; fever, also, is one of the earlier symptoms of infantile paralysis. But the New Testament use of the words "paralysis" and "fever" is too purely colloquial for much to hinge upon possible identifications or differences. The description of the malady is not sufficiently exact to enable us to say with certainty either that John is giving another version of the Matthew-Luke story, correcting some points on which his memory notes that they have gone astray, or that he is giving an entirely unrelated story which happens to have some features in common with theirs, the most marked being the similarity of the persons concerned and the healing at a distance.

This healing was mediated through a third person whose faith in Jesus was the means by which it was conveyed to the sufferer, and the faith apparently was not of a very high quality (v. 48). The king's officer was not concerned with any spiritual gift; his concern was to get his son healed. On the other hand, the supreme concern of Jesus was not with the sickness, but with the faith; and John underlines this in the description of the spiritual consequences to the officer and his household. Jesus saw into the depths (cf. "He knew what was in man," Jn. 2. 25); right down to the unsuspected thing of worth in a man's soul; to



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the faith that seems so small and so poor in quality. Of that He made much, responding to it with all that He was and all that He had. The "sign" elicited and strengthened a faith already there. Those who believe, see; and, seeing, believe more surely and fully. Faith, like religion, is learnt not by defining it but by experiencing it. John's Gospel, like Paul's epistles, was written by one who saw that "the spirit quickeneth, the satisfaction of the senses profiteth nothing" (compare Jn. 6. 63 with 2 Cor. 3. 6), and that the natural man who walked by sight, not by faith, could not receive spiritual things until he had learnt to go on his way believing (compare Jn. 4. 50 with 1 Cor. 2. 14).

Possibly the statement that this was the second sign performed by Jesus in Galilee (v. 54) was made to guard against a confusion of this incident with the one already known in the other Gospels. The healing of the centurion's servant must come later in the Galilean mission than Jesus' second miracle, for Mark's chronology requires at least that the "specimen" sabbath at Capernaum (Mk. 1. 21-34) with its two miracles and its evening crowd shall come before the interview with the centurion. But it may be that John uses "second sign" to indicate a second "mighty work" whose purpose was that men might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, as distinct from the many healings which were animated by sheer love and sympathy with human need or suffering.

## THE CLEANSING OF A LEPER

(Matt. 8. 1-4; Mk. 1. 40-45; Lk. 5. 12-14)

It is generally agreed that "leprosy" in the Bible does not denote the disease which we know by that name, and that the confusion has arisen from the varying use of the name among different peoples. The disease of which we think was a terribly common affliction in Christendom in the Middle Ages; its technical name in our Lord's time was probably "Elephantiasis Græcorum"—which must not be confused with the disease now known as "elephantiasis." Leprosy, to the ancient Greek physician, was some scaly form of skin disease, and its name was used by the Septuagint translators when they had to find a Greek equivalent for the term used in Lev. 13. The affliction described in Leviticus is essentially a skin disease, and appears to have included a variety of cutaneous disorders, especially the forms of psoriasis. It is evident that many of the levitical regulations cannot have been framed with a view to the dreadful, chronic, infectious disease technically known to modern medicine as tubercular leprosy, for which there was no hope of any healing until of late years. A glance through the chapter of Leviticus shows clearly that its provisions are concerned with some ailment from which recovery was to be anticipated: the regulation of v. 13 would



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never have been made if tubercular leprosy was under contemplation. These laws forbid the "leper" coming into contact with his fellows, and outlaw him temporarily, as ritually unclean, until his recovery. It is important to note that the leper is "unclean," not a "sick" man; other diseases are healed, leprosy is cleansed.

The leper of the Gospel story came up to our Lord in the crowd (Matthew) or in the village street (Luke). This was a disregard of the regulations—unless Luke's description of him as "full of leprosy" was technically correct. In that case he would come under the permission given in Lev. 13. 13 to a leper "covered with whiteness," who was allowed to mingle with other people as "clean." But the tenor of the whole story suggests rather that the technical term is added as an inference from the man's presence in a public place, and that the inference was a mistaken one.

Mark uses three strong expressions to describe the emotions this man's conduct aroused in Jesus. First, that He was "moved with compassion" (v. 41). One famous manuscript reads "being angered" in place of this. Matthew omits all references to our Lord's emotions in this story; elsewhere, when "anger" is noted in Mark he omits it: but, on the other hand, he is careful to preserve references to our Lord's "compassions," and Luke also is attracted by this motive. Neither of them mention "compassion" here; the inference seems to be that in their text of Mark, as in this ancient text quoted above the original word was "anger." The other two references are in v. 43—

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"And he strictly charged him, and straightway sent him out." "Strictly charged" is a rather mild rendering of a word which conveys "the notion of coercion springing out of displeasure, anger, indignation, antagonism" (Souter's *Lexicon*). "At once thrust him out" would be a literal translation of the rest of the verse. These are unusually violent terms to employ for any act of Jesus towards a person; and it is not easy to understand how these three words came to be used unless they reflect Jesus' strong and indignant disapproval of something in the leper's behaviour; and the most obvious reason for such disapproval is the man's breach of the law and selfish lack of consideration for the danger to others.

There is no real ground for the suggestion that the leper was a man now recovered who was asking Jesus to "declare him clean." The word he uses had, in medicine, the technical significance of "cleanse by healing"; which is something that goes before any such declaration; moreover, there is no reason to suppose that such a declaration on the part of Jesus would be of any legal value to the man; he needed the priest's certificate if he was free from disease.

He had complete faith in the ability of Christ to cure him, but was by no means certain of His willingness. His estimate of Christ's power was, as the sequel showed, a true estimate: the Master's "I will" and His compassionate touching of one whose affliction had made him a stranger to human contacts completed the estimate as to our Lord's ability and willingness. The faith this estimate



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represented was at once operative: "straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean."

Before we decide that this is another example of healing by suggestion, it is as well to reflect that cutaneous disorders, most of which arise from impurities of the blood, are not much akin to nervous troubles such as might be amenable to instant cure by a strong mental impression.

The leper represents an interesting contrast to the modern attitude. The earliest people who knew Jesus had no doubts about His power, but were not so sure of His willingness: the tendency to-day seems towards a view of God which does not question His benevolent inclinations, but doubts whether He is in a position to do anything that might be described as arbitrary, because of our theories of the operation of natural law. Our doubt is partly scientific in its origin and arises from the methods of our investigation of the nature of things; and it is partly a philosophical doubt—of a philosophy that is ultimately akin to fatalism, or to the Greek Necessity. But when the soul is seeking God neither the scientific nor the philosophical view concerns it; the religious point of view then becomes rightly supreme.

Mark reports the sternly-rebuking tone in which Jesus enjoined silence upon the man and ordered him to report immediately with the appropriate altar-offering to the priest and obtain official recognition of his freedom from disease. A lesson in obedience to law seems to have been needed by this legal outcast who, as Matthew says, "came right up to" Jesus. Mark also says that Jesus "thrust him

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out," and it has been suggested that the man had actually entered a house where Jesus was—a flagrantly illegal act (cf. Lev. 13. 46); but this is rather a large inference to draw from a prefix used by a foreigner writing colloquial, and often limping Greek. It is in direct opposition to the descriptions of locality in the other evangelists.

The leper's disregard of the injunction to silence is omitted by Matthew and Luke, but Mark tells us that this was the cause of Jesus being for a while unable to enter any town and obliged to stay in unfrequented places; which suggests a period of quarantine incurred by our Lord on account of His contact with the leper.



## THE TEN LEPERS

(Lk. 17. 11-19)

LUKE's interest in this story is largely in the fact of a foreigner's faith in Jesus, which "illustrates the special theme of this Gospel" (Plummer).

The ten men greeted Jesus at the entrance of some unnamed village lying on the frontier route from the north to Jerusalem which runs for some distance between Samaria and Galilee. They were of mixed nationalities, their common ostracism having brought them together. More careful of the law than the leper of Mark's story, they hailed Him from a distance, imploring His pity.

"And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go and shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed."

It is a very instructive instance of our Lord's requirement of faith. Nothing had been *done* to them, so far as the lepers' consciousness of any action was concerned: for, apparently, they had no sign or feeling of cleansing until they were on their way to their priests. They had merely received an order to do a certain thing themselves. In life no one begins with knowing: we begin by learning, and learning is chiefly through doing, coming sometimes by achievement, sometimes by failure. In either case men venture before they have. This

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primitive exercise of primitive faith was the first essential without which mankind could never have acquired any of its science. The lepers illustrate the old adage, "nothing venture, nothing have." They obeyed the order given, and the faith of their obedience made a more perfect obedience possible (cf. p. 128). There were ten of them, and it is but reasonable to suppose the ten diverse temperaments were diversely affected by His word; the impulse to obey would manifest itself first in one and then in another, until the little faith of some is reinforced by the greater faith of others and, at last, individual doubts and hesitations give way to a common resolve to put this order to the test.

In one case this faith rose to an actual assurance and the man, before the priest had certified his cure, returned to give thanks and "glorified God with a loud voice." To him, a Samaritan, Jesus explained that his faith had effected his cure.

Dean Inge (in *Faith and Knowledge*) says that in the New Testament miracles "faith" is simply the psychological state which alone makes the patient susceptible to cures of this kind. But if we make reasonable allowance for the condensed nature of the reports given, it seems justifiable to assume that any contact or intercourse with Jesus aroused an instinctive emotion of the soul which made it more aware of the presence of God and more sensitive to the energy of that divine Love ever seeking to reveal itself. Just as life may be scientifically defined as the reaction of the organism to its environment, so faith, which is life at its highest power, may be thought of as the reaction of the soul to God Who



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is its real Environment. To dismiss all "faith-" healing as mere auto-suggestion may be to miss the vital point. If it is true—and it is a medical commonplace—that folk can be cured by a bottle or two of coloured water with impressive instructions as to quantity and occasion of dose; or that saints' bones, charms, "holy" water, and other entirely neutral agencies often suffice for a cure; then evidently something in the patient's self, his belief or faith, not the medicine or the charm, does the work. The distinctiveness of Christ's teaching would seem to be that we are never to permit faith to rest on anything lower than the highest; it is to be "faith in God" (Mk. 11. 22). This faith is the only condition Jesus appears to consider necessary for healing. He does not ask whether people desire spiritual blessing, only if they do really desire health. The nine who did not come back are evidence of this, for they can scarcely be regarded as the subjects of any work of spiritual grace.

## THE EAR OF THE HIGH-PRIEST'S SERVANT

(Lk. 22. 49-53. Compare Matt. 26. 51-53 ;  
Mk 14. 47, 48 ; Jn 18. 10, 11)

THIS healing is recorded only by Luke ; but the scuffle which occasioned it is mentioned in all four accounts of the Arrest. We may put their accounts together for such information as they yield. Mark says that a bystander, whom Matthew admits to have been " one of the disciples,"

" drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear."

Luke says that the assailant was one of our Lord's company and adds that it was the right ear which suffered. John is much more explicit :

" Simon Peter therefore having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus. Jesus therefore said unto Peter, Put up the sword into the sheath."

If Matthew and Luke derived their account from Mark—from Peter's preaching, that is—we can understand why no names were given till John wrote at a later date when no ill consequences were likely to fall upon the parties mentioned.

Luke's statement of the healing is in v. 51 :

" But Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him." (R.V.)



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It is not an easy verse to interpret. If the words of Jesus were addressed to the men about to effect His arrest, they may have been a plea to excuse His follower's precipitate action which He at once seeks to atone; or they may have been a request for a further moment's liberty of action. Moffatt translates in this sense: "Let me do this at least,"—as if our Lord were asking to be granted a delay for a last act of compassion. But verses 52, 53 rather imply that He was not yet seized. If He spoke the words to His disciples and the translation of the Revised Version is followed the saying amounts to an injunction to observe the principle of non-resistance.

It is certainly unique that all four evangelists should record the wounding and that only one should record the healing. Dr. Abbott (*Classical Review*, 1893) suggested that in the original tradition some ambiguous word was used in Christ's command to Peter, "Restore it (the sword) to its place" (cf. Matt. 26. 52; Jn. 18. 11), and that Luke interpreted the restoration as applying to the ear. Luke does, at times, "interpret" the documents from which he is compiling (cf. Lk. 1. 1-3; for a possible example *v. supra*, p. 124). In this place he alone has replaced the colloquial diminutive for "ear" by the literary form (see v. 50; he has omitted to do so in v. 51). There is, however, no real evidence in support of Dr. Abbott's conjecture.

The narrative speaks of Jesus touching the ear itself, which implies that it was not completely severed from the head. The first concern must be

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with the facts, and not with any inferences from them. Is there anything more in Luke's account than a statement that Jesus intervened at once on behalf of the wounded man and that his wound was eventually healed? Have we assumed too hastily that the healing was instantaneous, on the analogy of other cases in which immediate recovery is emphasized? This is the only surgical case among the records of healing, and instant restoration of a severed member is without analogy in human experience; on the other hand, small members accidentally lopped off and immediately replaced and bound in position have often enough reunited. An instantaneous healing is not unthinkable; it would be no more "inexplicable" than some other reported cures we have examined. The first question is whether we have an entirely unambiguous report of such a cure. If we have "good history" we must accept it; but we must make sure it is good history and not merely assumption from facts that do not necessarily carry all our conclusions. The narrative is one which presents difficulties, of expression on the part of Luke and of omission on the part of the other evangelists, which justify some hesitation in including it among the miraculous acts of our Lord. It certainly is another instance of the self-forgetting sympathy of Jesus, an example of that thought for others which becomes oblivious to personal peril at sight of another's trouble.



## “THE DEAD ARE RAISED”

THERE are three miracles which one hesitates to speak of, without some preliminary comment, as “healings”; for the narratives convey, and undoubtedly meant to their original writers, that they were cases of re-animation after physical decease.

They present peculiar difficulties to the enquirer; and though the demands on our faith are not greater than in other reported miracles, the demands on our attention and thought are more exacting in at least two of the three stories given.

The most obvious difficulty in the way of our understanding these stories is that our Lord’s view of “death”—and of “life”—was so imperfectly grasped by His contemporaries, even by His own intimates before the Resurrection, that we cannot always be quite sure whether they are speaking in the terms of His concept or of their own. Perhaps also we have to allow for the fact that His view is so little real to us that for all ordinary references we persist in retaining their conceptions, and suppose ourselves in entire agreement with our Lord because we have decided that He was speaking in a “spiritual” sense, and that “spiritually,” of course, what He says is beautiful and true.

## “THE DEAD ARE RAISED”

“There is no death. What seems so is transition.

This life of mortal breath

Is but a suburb of the life elysian,

Whose portals we call death.”

We assent to this; but “for practical purposes” we talk and act on the assumption that “life” means physical existence and “death” its termination, even when, theologically speaking, we profess that our doctrine and our Master’s is the certain continuity of life.

A second difficulty that has to be recognized in connection with these stories is the impossibility of knowing whether physical death had really taken place; death, that is, to the satisfaction of a modern practitioner called upon to issue a certificate. If to-day a person were “restored to life,” in the eyes of the doctor death has not really taken place: even if he had certified it he would say that he had been mistaken in his diagnosis. There are plenty of authenticated accounts of cases of “suspended animation” and consequent premature burial: of people in catalepsy who have returned from their trance-state after all preparations for interment have been made. These facts are so well accredited that it is no uncommon thing for a testator to direct that his decease be assured by some irrevocable act of the doctor’s after it has been decreed to have taken place. The mediæval belief in vampirism is simply testimony to the occurrence of cases of catalepsy in those times; and we have no reason for supposing that the trance-state, or conditions of coma, or of complete paralysis, are only of as recent occurrence as their diagnosis. The prolonged



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treatment now administered in the case of the apparently-drowned makes one recognize that there must have been many circumstances in times past when men took it for granted all too readily that physical death had taken place. To-day it is frequently held that unmistakable signs of dissolution are the only proof that the cessation of the vital function is permanent.

For new Testament times we have already noted the readiness with which people concluded "death" from the mere absence of any signs of life (see above, p. 79). Another good example is the case of Eutychus, stunned and unconscious after his fall (Acts 20. 9 f.); the history says he "was picked up a corpse"—the word admits of no suggestion of a metaphor. Yet Paul, having closely examined him, assured them that "his life is in him." In other words, it was a case of concussion.

A third difficulty is that there is not the necessary information in the stories to answer all the questions that may be asked. Of the genuineness and truthfulness of the narratives there need be no question; but it is a question, to many minds, what *are* the facts which they relate; and on many points which could never have occurred to a mind of the first century there is, naturally enough, no information.

There are only three such stories; but the proportion is sufficient to warrant us in supposing that the summaries in which the raising of the dead is mentioned may have other occasions in view: there are only four cases given of the kind specially designated by Mark as "possession," but his own narrative shows that his list is not exhaustive,

## “THE DEAD ARE RAISED”

but merely illustrative. John's testimony (20. 30) makes it quite clear that there was no idea of making a complete record of cases.

The three stories for our consideration are the raisings of Jairus' daughter at Capernaum, of the widow's son at Nain, and of Lazarus at Bethany.



## THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

(Matt. 9. 18-19, 23-26; Mk. 5. 21-24, 35-43;  
Lk. 8. 40-42, 49-56)

ONCE again, Mark's account is the simplest, fullest and most pictorial: Matthew and Luke add little or nothing to suggest an independent source for their information.

The president of a synagogue in Capernaum came up to Jesus and knelt before Him, intreating Him:

"My little daughter is dying" (Matthew says "has just died").

"Come and lay your hands on her that she may be healed and live."

Luke puts this into oblique narration, saying that the man, Jairus by name, had an only daughter, about twelve years old (Mark states her age later in the story), who was dying.

Jesus went with Jairus to his house. Matthew notes that disciples accompanied Him. The three evangelists then narrate the delay occasioned by the incident of the woman suffering from hemorrhage. Before this incident was closed a messenger arrived from the house saying:

"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher to come?"

Upon this Jesus turned to Jairus and said:

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"Do not be fearful: just believe."

Luke adds, "and she will recover." It is not a demand for belief in Himself as this or that, but for an attitude towards Himself of unabated confidence and expectancy. "Belief" is here a readiness to receive; the spirit of adventure which has not closed the door to the possibilities of hitherto unknown experiences.

Matthew omits the reference to the messenger and the encouragement: he has abbreviated the story by beginning at the point where death is already presumed.

Either at this stage (so Mark), or on arriving at the house (so Luke), Jesus dismissed all who were accompanying Him save Peter, James and John. Once again we are reminded that faith requires fellowship (*v. supra*, p. 94). At the house the hired mourners—flute-players (Matthew) and professional wailers for the dead—were already making their lamentations. Jesus put them all outside saying:

"The child is not dead, but she sleeps."

They laughed at Him ("knowing she was dead," Luke adds). With the parents and His three chosen companions, Jesus "went in where the child was" (Mark only). Taking her by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha koum"—it is Mark who preserves for us the Aramaic, handed on to him by one of those present—which is, in English, "Get up, little girl."

The little girl got up at once, Mark adds, "and began to walk," observing parenthetically that she was twelve years old: Luke says "her spirit



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returned": Matthew summarizes, "he went in, took her hand, and the little girl got up."

Mark and Luke record the general astonishment and note that Jesus ordered that some food should be given to the child. This thoughtful after-care ministered to the little patient's obvious need and at the same time gave a practical reassurance to her mother, for whom the fact that the child was able again to take food would be a sure sign that she was better.

While far from wishing to "explain away" this wonderful work, we cannot but ask why our Lord said so definitely that she was "not dead." The reference to Lazarus ("Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," Jn. 11. 11) is not exactly a parallel case, for then Jesus not only did *not* say "not dead," but He was speaking to His own companions with whom it may be supposed He desired and tried to share His view of physical death. Here there is an uninstructed crowd who could not be expected to take His words in other than their literal sense; that they did so, their scornful laughter is proof. So far as the evangelists Matthew and Mark are concerned, His words were apparently taken to imply that life was still present—that the child was in a death-like swoon. It is Luke alone who says that the mourners knew she was dead; but he is not producing new evidence, for those people were there because death was presumed to have taken place; and this must have been a very recent presumption since the father's errand was undertaken when she was alive but, according to their estimate, in a very critical condition. When Luke says "her spirit returned"

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he is simply reflecting the current opinion that the soul lingered awhile near to the body, seeking, and sometimes finding, readmission; a belief that the mysterious phenomena of unconsciousness, trance and comatose conditions would probably foster.

If death had not taken place, there was a little child in, say, a condition of coma; difficult, almost impossible to distinguish from death; a condition which modern medical science can only contemplate and do nothing to remove. Certainly the child would have been buried as dead but for the intervention of Jesus: He diagnosed this condition with absolute assurance—even without seeing the patient—and by a touch and a word was able at once to dispel the condition and the illness of which it was the outcome.

This may be, to some minds, less “miraculous”; but it is quite unprofitable to assign degrees or grades to deeds which, in their apparently effortless ease and their immediate accomplishment, far transcend any “scientific” healings and resuscitations of which the medical profession has record. Distinctions as to difficulty in these matters are really meaningless and arise purely from our modern way of regarding them; if we could put ourselves back into the condition of knowledge that obtained in our Lord’s day, we should recognize that “difficulty” was not a question of grade. There is no evidence that the raising of the dead meant more to our Lord’s contemporaries than, say, the cure of a possessed man; nor are they recorded as occasioning any supreme degree of astonishment.

The Master’s sole means of cure were the faith



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of His friends, the encouraged expectancy of the child's parents, His sympathetic touch, and the power of His spoken word.

How such faith is operative, we do not know; but we are slowly learning to regard the universe as a closely related whole, faithful in its reactions to a degree that never entered the minds of an earlier science, with mental, physical and spiritual activities producing consequences not simply in their several spheres, as had been assumed, but throughout the unity of the universe. When wireless telegraphy demonstrates to us that a man's thought may be a direct cause of physical action almost immediately hundreds of miles away from the brain that conceived it, it suggests to us that in the universe viewed spiritually faith may release energies, of which we have as yet little knowledge, whose reactions on their material environment are of greater moment than is generally recognized. We read that Jesus laid His hands upon the apparently irresponsive fingers of the motionless little child: we do not understand why a touch should have any efficacy, but we do know that the contact of two ends of filament, fine as a hair, may suffice to flood a dark room with brilliant light. We are told that Jesus spoke to that little form whose senses had all ceased to respond to the messages of the external world; spoke with ordinary words, guiltless of any tinge of magic or of learning, just such homely words as the mother used when with a gentle touch she had roused the girl at getting-up time many a morning: we do not know why a word should call a human spirit from some mysterious bourne, but we do know

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from the orator's experience in all ages that the spoken word of mortals has been at times powerful to stir emotions so deeply asleep that their very existence was unsuspected. And if there is any credence to be attached to history, we know that Jesus was One who released spiritual energies and spoke words of power with assured certainty and unerring knowledge, "as never man spake."



## THE RAISING AT NAIN

(Lk. 7. 11-17)

LUKE alone records this event, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the motive of compassion, a feature of our Lord's character which appealed so strongly to this evangelist, had something to do with his inclusion of the story in his Gospel. The disciples were with the Master at the time (see v. 11); but the incident did not appeal to them as calling for special mention. If it ever came to their minds again it was but as an item, not specially extraordinary, in that life of going about and doing good which they had witnessed. We do not know from whom Luke received his account; but it is evident that it came from someone to whom the whole scene was a cherished memory.

The site of Nain is not known with absolute certainty, but a little hamlet called Nein, about a day's journey from Capernaum, probably preserves the memory of this town: it cannot be the place mentioned by Josephus, for that is on the other side of the Jordan and the context here implies that the incident occurred during the Galilean ministry.

Luke sketches the scene in a few graphic words. The procession passing through the city gate on its way to the rock-hewn tombs of the burying-place outside the walls is quite a considerable one, for a

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widow who has lost her only son is desolate indeed and many are present out of sympathy. Jesus and His company meet them, and our Lord is touched by the encounter; He speaks to the mother walking in front of the bier with its open wicker coffin and bids her dry her tears, then touching the bier He stops its bearers; in the sudden stillness His word comes, "Young man, to thee I say, Arise." It is an emphatic word to some person whose name is not known to the speaker; "and the dead man sat up and began to speak."

If anyone suggests the possibility of trance conditions, we cannot say that they are excluded by any data given. Strauss (*Leben Jesu*) long ago pointed out that this trance-theory is quite unsatisfactory as an explanation. If we adopt it, justifying our doing so by the fact that the funeral, in accordance with the usage of the time and country, would take place within twenty-four hours of death, we are confronted by mystery. How can we explain Jesus' swift, unerring knowledge of this unusual catalepsy? How account for the uniqueness of a personality that can invade with ease the frontiers of unconsciousness and destroy its barriers with a word, so that its captive may return? In each instance of resuscitation the return to consciousness was in obedience to Christ's word of command; He had a word of power to wake the sleepers who were deaf to all other earthly sounds.

The instinct of the evangelist lays hold of the permanent value of the incident. Where art might find an effective touch in portraying the incredulous joy of the bereaved mother he notes the awe that



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fell upon the company, how the deed created a new sense of God's nearness in their minds. They had a repetition of the experience of their ancestor Jacob,

“ Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not ” (Gen. 28. 16).

The act of Jesus reminded them of Elijah at Zarephath, or of Elisha at Shunem, and they spoke of Him as a prophet whose word of power made God a great reality to them. Was not this the supreme purpose of the miracle for all concerned ?

## THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

(Jn. II. 1-44)

THE actual deed at Bethany is recorded in vv. 17-44, but the narrative prologue is essential to its understanding. The story of Lazarus has been more discussed than any other miracle related in the Gospels, and more variously interpreted. Not only has its genuineness as history been roundly denied, but it has been alleged that it supplies a motive for the final tragic scenes quite other than that given by the Synoptists, and that there is no place afforded by their chronology for such an incident. The first of these criticisms overlooks the intensely Galilean outlook of the earlier evangelists and their general silence about events on Judæan soil before the final crisis; the second disregards the fact that John's scheme is not chronological: even if his events follow the true course of the life there are many periods passed over in silence and without any reference to the fact that they are passed over; these are only some of the "things which Jesus did," and the fact of "many other" things not written is freely stated (cf. Jn. 20. 30, 31). In this particular instance there is no need to assume that v. 55, which begins a new section of narrative, follows immediately in time upon the events just recorded.



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The silence of the other three evangelists concerning this incident has been declared by some to be a fatal objection to its historic truth and has by others been explained in various ways; unfavourable criticism making much of the idea that so stupendous an event, had it occurred in the manner related, could not possibly have been omitted from any record of the marvellous life. John, for the purpose of his memoirs, makes a deliberate selection: he takes three "signs" which were given on Judæan soil and four which took place in Galilee. In the apostolic preaching which forms the basis of the Synoptic Gospels there are no Jerusalem miracles save the incidents of the figtree and the wound of Malchus,<sup>1</sup> both immediately connected with the last scenes of our Lord's earthly life; not one of John's Judæan "signs," then, is to be found in the Synoptics. Of his four Galilean signs two—the feeding of the multitude and the walking on the sea—are certainly in the Synoptic tradition, possibly a third (*v. pp. 134 f.*). Had the raising of Lazarus taken place in Galilee the silence of the other evangelists might have been ominous; as it is, it not only does not stand alone but is in accordance with the general features of his Gospel. It would not have been in accordance with his selection if this Judæan event had been recorded by the others.

Undoubtedly for John it was an event of unique importance; he finds in it a significance that illuminates the whole mission and purpose of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Reference should be made to the consideration of the "miraculous" character of these narratives, a point that was dealt with in the studies of them.

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But we do not know that he so saw it at the time, or that other men at that earlier day realized how much it conveyed. The words Browning puts into the mouth of the dying evangelist may be a true interpretation—

“What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.”

*A Death in the Desert.*

The raising took place in an inner circle of the little society. Perhaps to the earlier chroniclers it was more of a family matter, something not so widely known as the recall of Jairus' daughter, and of private and personal, rather than of general, interest. The disciples were with Him when it took place and must have known of it (cf. vv. 15, 16); possibly Peter did not think of it as specially illustrative of the claims put forward for the Master he proclaimed. Perhaps the earlier reticence was observed in the interests of the Bethany household—a reticence no longer necessary when John wrote. Some confirmation of this suggestion may be found in the vagueness of the stories of Mary's anointing, where it is only from John that we learn the names of those concerned (cf. Mk. 14. 3 ff.; Matt. 26. 6 ff.; Jn. 12. 1 ff.). The fulness of the Lazarus story is due partly at any rate to the fact that the persons concerned were in such close connection with our Lord, and it is reasonably probable that the evangelist's own subsequent associations with the Bethany household kept the details fresh in his memory.

This last “sign” recorded by John is, like his first, in Judæa; both are narrated only by him;



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both are domestic—that is, they are among close friends and disciples in the atmosphere of home; both are discerned to have as their purpose the strengthening of His followers' faith; both accomplish this by manifestation of "glory." Jesus Himself stated (v. 4) that this was the Divine purpose in the sickness of Lazarus. Now John saw God's glory manifested not, as is sometimes too readily supposed, in the performance of a stupendous miracle but in that perfect revelation of the Divine love which was consummated in the Cross: so he said that the sermon on "the last, great day of the feast" did not give immediate illumination "because Jesus was not yet glorified" (7. 39), and when the betrayal was at hand he wrote, "now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (13. 31). In the same way this miracle revealed the glory of God in the love of Christ, for it showed Him venturing into the danger-zone of Jerusalem, with ultimately fatal results, at the call of affection: it is the "first lesson" of the Cross, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (15. 13).

It is reasonable to infer that this story explains the abrupt termination of a Peræan mission undertaken when an attempt to arrest Jesus in Judæa (10. 39) had driven the company across the Jordan to seek safety in scenes with which they had been familiar during the mission of the Baptist. In this mission He was engaged when the message was delivered from Bethany, a day's journey distant.

The story is full of details testifying to personal remembrance, details which would not suggest

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themselves to one engaged in imaginative writing, for they are purposeless from a fiction-writer's point of view. Examples of this are to be found in vv. 5, 6, the relation of our Lord to the household; in v. 6, the "two days"; in v. 18, the position of Bethany, and the visitors from Jerusalem; in v. 28, the intimation given secretly lest any visitor should take tidings to the authorities; the conveyance of the news by the use of their familiar name for Jesus—"Teacher"; in v. 30, Jesus' keeping outside the village; in vv. 31, 32, the natural misinterpretation of Mary's hurried departure, the courteous sympathy of the visitors that frustrated the plan of secrecy; in v. 32, Mary's prostration; in vv. 33, 35, 38, the successive stages of our Lord's emotion; in v. 39, Martha's protest; in v. 44, the particularity of the description of the appearance of Lazarus. The persons are clearly characterized, as by one to whom they were well known; it is noteworthy, too, that the portraits are recognizably of the same sisters as those who figure in the stories of the other evangelists (cf. Lk. 10. 38 ff.).

The message reported the illness of one dear to Christ and is eloquent of the intimacy between Him and this family. Our Lord's comment upon the message, "This illness is not to end in death, but its purpose is the glory of God," is in perfect harmony with the end He had always in view—to teach that the reality of God in human affairs is the true inspiration of the kind of life men ought to live.

The parenthesis of v. 5, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," explains that affection



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was strongly tempting Jesus to go on receiving the summons, a true, human motive. He waited, however, that He might be clear as to God's will (vv. 9, 10), and then (v. 11), after two days' delay, announced His return to Judæa. Judæa spelt danger and the disciples demurred. There was probably considerable discussion, for at first Jesus simply proposed to go Himself; later (v. 15), it is evident that the disciples have so expressed themselves that He includes some of them in the proposed journey. The main tenor of the conversation is preserved for us; this side-issue is only revealed by inference. Jesus brushed aside their suggestion of peril and said that as Lazarus was sleeping He must go to awaken him. This should have been significant enough, but the disciples' minds were preoccupied with the thought of peril and they misunderstood, interpreted it hopefully as a sign of convalescence which would make a visit to the danger-zone about Jerusalem unnecessary. Jesus made it plain, therefore, that what He called "sleep" was what they persisted in regarding as "death," an end of things. That there might be no further misunderstanding He said, "Lazarus died"; and added that for their sakes He was glad He was not there at the time; they would now be able to learn to believe as He did about "sleep" and "death." It is clear that in this Sign of Love and Life the raising to a corruptible life is essentially distinct from our Lord's own rising again to a glorified life. "Let us go to *him*," said Jesus; not to the sisters, but to Lazarus. Upon this Thomas, loyal but pessimistic, called on the others to go that they might perish with the Master

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Who was so set upon going to His death and without Whom life would be no longer worth while.

On arrival they learned that Lazarus had been buried four days before ; reckoning the time for the messenger's journey and for their journey, and allowing for the two days' delay, he must have been dead at the time the message reached them in Peræa. In John's casual statement that Bethany *was* about two miles from Jerusalem some see an inference that it no longer existed ; that it had been destroyed in the military operations which culminated in the fall of Jerusalem ; and that this had taken place before he wrote his story. John probably mentions the distance to explain why Jerusalemites were paying visits of condolence to the bereaved sisters, and to make clear the risks of approaching so near to the adversaries of our Lord.

Martha, the elder sister and mistress of the house (cf. Lk. 10. 38-40), engaged in receiving the visitors, had the tidings brought to her of the presence of Jesus and at once set out to speak to Him : Mary, remaining in the seclusion of the private apartments, did not hear the news. These are the sisters of the Lukan story, the one practical and the other contemplative ; and this picture of them by another hand shows the same characteristics differentiating the two women in a time of sorrow. The obvious inference is that both stories are "true to life," and relate facts about real, not imaginary, persons.

Martha's greeting of Christ is an evidence of how those who knew Him regarded Him : if He had been there He could and would have healed the sick man ; even now she considered it was not impossible that



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if He were to pray His prayer might be heard of God : but this was a remote contingency scarcely to be taken into account. It is a picture of what they thought—and of what they did not think—concerning Him. When He spoke of Lazarus rising again, it was received as a pious consolation : Martha replied as one to whom her loss was a present fact and “resurrection” a remote belief. Perhaps our Lord’s word did not suggest restoration to a physical life ; it amounted to a reminder to Martha that the faith which Lazarus had was for him an assurance of that higher life over which physical death had no power. Jesus then spoke to her of resurrection, not as a doctrine, but as a fact ; not a future, but a present : life as an unbroken continuity—“I am,” not “I give” or “I bring.”

“‘I am the resurrection and the life,’ said Christ. ‘He that believes in me, even if he shall have died (physically) shall live (spiritually). And everyone that lives and believes in me shall never die spiritually.’”

The dead, that is, shall live : the living shall never die. To Christ life and death are simply two modes of existence (compare Paul : “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” Phil. i. 21).

Resurrection and life : are these two things ? or is this an identification of them with each other ?

This declaration Jesus followed with a searching personal question, “Is this your belief ?” (Not to be interpreted as if He had said, “Do you admit my argument ?” for it is an enquiry as to Martha’s personal conviction.) “Failing to understand, she falls back on her belief in His Messiahship.” So

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Dr. A. E. Brooke interprets; but, as in so many accounts of Christ's works, the conversation is to elicit the activity of faith. Faith that conditions miracle and that results in miracle is only a specific movement of that entire trust in Himself. Through the needs which men felt, or the relief which they sought, Jesus led men to God. Faith is a committal of oneself to another, and that other, Christ.

Martha answered with a new confidence and went to seek her sister. She conveyed to her the news of the Master's arrival, using their familiar name ("the Teacher") for Jesus, that the import of it might be for Mary's ears alone; and told her that Jesus desired her presence. That was not in the conversation as reported, so we know that we have only a *précis*, not a verbatim report.

The intention to keep the matter private was frustrated by the visitors, for they accompanied Mary thinking that she was going to the tomb. Mary impulsively hurried to Him and fell at His feet—the Mary of the Lukan story, surely! Some of the sympathetic visitors, moved by our Lord's unrestrained sorrow, remarked upon His love and sympathy and mournfully regretted that He had not been present earlier. These were Jews from Jerusalem who were not hostile.

The evangelist stresses very strongly the repressed emotion of Jesus and His struggle for self-control; he seems to be endeavouring to convey two sides of that emotional crisis. There is the characteristic way in which our Lord entered into and shared the feelings of others, so that His miracles are wrought not merely by power, but by the definite power of



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an intense sympathy:<sup>1</sup> and there is also the reluctance to recall His friend even for a season to take up afresh the burden of mortality; but the faith of His disciples needed building up to resurrection-height, for all were thinking in the old, hopeless way concerning the death of the body.

Arrived at the grave, Jesus asked for the stone which sealed it to be removed. Martha protested, for Lazarus had been four days dead and decomposition would have set in; it was a natural shrinking from exposing the ravages wrought by death on one near and dear. But the protest revealed how far Martha was from the expectation of any miraculous happening. The "three days" during which the spirit was supposed to remain near the body seeking an opportunity to return (*v. supra*, p. 157) had passed, and change would have set in.

Appeal was again made for a spirit of faith, and Jesus prayed that God would use this occasion for the strengthening of His friends' faith. Then with a loud, authoritative call He summoned Lazarus—note that in each account of re-animation the "quickening" is connected with the personal address—and "the dead man came out, his face, his hands and his feet swathed in the cerecloths. And Jesus said, Set him free and let him go his way."

Can this scene be regarded as a deliberate imposture on those present wrought by Jesus, with or without the connivance of His friends, as suggested by Renan? Or can this record be considered as a piece of imaginative religious fiction? Surely

<sup>1</sup> Note how this agrees with the Synoptic portrait: Mk. 7. 34; Matt. 8. 17; Lk. 8. 46; and other references; also cf. Heb. 5. 7.

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neither hypothesis is tenable; the one involves a moral monstrosity quite inconceivable, the other a moral miracle as inexplicable as the miracle itself.

The portrait of a human Jesus, moved by human emotions, breaking down in His effort to restrain His sorrow and sympathy, seeking information as to the burial-place as any other might, dependent on His Father's will, needing prayer and waiting to know it, acting in obedience to it and praying a real, human prayer, is the portrait of One with Whom the Synoptists have made us familiar. Such characteristics are held to be testimony to the historic truth of their narratives; they cannot be less so here.

John's use of this miracle as a "sign" is testimony to the writer's great insight; it is a sign that Jesus' love for His friends is so great that, at its bidding, He takes all risks; it is a sign that it was sheer love that led Him to Calvary. If the evangelist invented this most moving story, the beauty of which is best seen when we simply read the Gospel narrative itself, we have a literary marvel of which Professor Sanday's judgment is surely most just—it would be "more difficult to accept than the miracle."

These stories of the raising of the dead have always been attacked as if in some way they were more improbable than other miracles, and have as regularly been advanced by apologists as supreme examples of our Lord's divine power. The initial misconception is the same in either case: it is only from a purely human standpoint that one miracle can be regarded as more wonderful than another, or more difficult to believe.



## CHRISTIANITY AND THE CURE OF DISEASE

THERE is a widespread and persistent interest in the question of the relation between religion and the cure of physical disease. Though the problem does not fall within the scope of our present study, the miracles of our Lord are so often and so freely cited that the question of their connection with some of the claims put forward should be considered. Jesus wrought His cures as a man and said to men who followed Him "the works that I do shall ye do also." From time to time the "commission to heal" has become the subject of discussion both inside the Christian Church and beyond its defined borders. To-day "Christian Science," "faith healing," "spiritual healing" and many similar terms are freely used in the daily Press, often in a very loose fashion, and are regarded as "somehow" connected with various forms of mental therapy such as suggestion, auto-suggestion and psychoanalysis. It is not easy to decide what some writers include or exclude in their use of the various terms, and this is a matter which deserves some attention.

If one may speak of man as a trinity composed of spirit, soul (or, rather, "mind"), and body, which three are truly one, it may also be allowable to recognize that his sicknesses are sometimes primarily of the spirit, sometimes of the mind, sometimes of

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the body. And because these three are the one man their interaction is more complete and far-reaching than is always recognized. This is also true of the possible methods of cure. Professor G. M. Robertson in a letter to *The Times*, dated September 5, 1923, points out that spiritual healing is not necessarily implied because its exponents have seen patients suffering from blindness and deafness cured. "We know that suggestion alone is capable of doing this. The paralysed arm of a hysteric, withered from disuse, may also become live and active by suggestion alone." Professor Robertson goes on to say that—

"It does no good—indeed, it does very much harm—to the cause of true religion to assert that a blind, or deaf, or paralytic patient was cured by 'spiritual healing' when mental suggestion alone may have been the curative agent."

The miracles of healing wrought by our Lord were "miracles" in His day, and He promised that His followers should do greater works still. Possibly many Christians fail to live up to the fulness of their promised resources simply because they fail to take pains to follow Him fully and faithfully. It is not a question of adopting His methods, but of following Him.

There are probably diseases of the human body which are solely spiritual in their origin. One writer on the subject has said :

"In its first origin everything must be spiritual, be it comet or toothache or genius. Just as mental suggestion has taken the place of tonics, so must spiritual healing take the place of mental suggestion. The spirit is the original manifestation



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of God in man, and it is on prayer and on faith that the whole science of healing will some day rest."

We live in a world where the healer is constantly confronted with consequences, and it is not clear that a perfect knowledge of causes will enable him to rectify ill-results by purely spiritual methods. A man may have a broken leg without any contributory spiritual negligence of his own; true, it may be due to some spiritual defect in another man, but the correction of that spiritual defect after the accident will not eliminate the fracture. Disease itself, however contracted, is often physical in its expression; so largely physical that spiritual serenity triumphant over pain is one of the stock common-places of the moralist. Our Lord certainly used in some cases, as we have noted, the conjunction of physical and spiritual means and in others of mental and spiritual means; in some cases there is nothing in the records to suggest appeal to spiritual means as such. We are told that He healed men, but we are not always told how He healed them: to assume that He invariably employed "spiritual" methods to the exclusion or supersession of the methods of His own time is to assume too much.

If the Church of Christ is to follow her Master and Lord she must take very careful note of His teaching in action. She must not antagonize agencies that He regarded as complementary to each other: faith and suggestion, for instance, work together, one on the spiritual, the other on the mental plane; and they are at one in that each requires expectation of victory or it must fail of its effect.

The first general principle laid down in the draft

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report of the Committee on Spiritual Healing appointed by the Lambeth Conference of 1920 is that—

“The Church must recognize methods of faith-healing in the treatment of bodily disease, but must be careful to apply such methods in accordance with scientific discoveries and analyses, made known to us by those who are investigating the inter-relation of mind and body. It is becoming more and more clear that the indiscriminate or unintelligent appeal to faith may bring some immediate relief, but may do more harm than good in the end.”

These are wise words, and all who are persuaded that “gifts of healing” are granted “from the Lord the Spirit” to those who seek them will be more likely to find if they give more heed to the mind that was in Christ Jesus. The subsequent life-history of all to whom our Lord ministered is a reminder that, sooner or later, the body is inevitably “sick unto death” and that eternal physical, or earthly life is not an article of the Christian creed, any more than it is of the revealed purpose of God in creation.



## SOME CONCLUSIONS AS TO THE METHODS AND CONDITIONS OF THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

THE narratives of Christ's life show that an essential characteristic of His ministry was His possession of miraculous powers. His works no less than His words made a great impression upon His contemporaries. Both moved them to astonishment and questioning: "What is the wisdom that is given to this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands?" (Mk. 6. 2). A large proportion of the stories refer to a miraculous ministry of healing and an examination of them, more particularly of such details as might assist a medical diagnosis, leads to the conclusion that many of the cases would not be regarded as hopelessly incurable by modern science, and that they include a considerable proportion of nervous and psychical disorders some of which modern medicine would probably consider suitable cases for treatment by the methods of psychotherapy.

Possibly the evidence for treatment by suggestion is in some of the cases sufficient to minimize the necessity for assuming any supernatural intervention. Our Lord's own insistent requirement of faith, sometimes specifically reported, on other occasions clearly to be inferred from the details of the stories, coupled with His assurances to patients that their

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faith had made them whole, lends support to this view. His use of some familiar methods and remedies, His sympathetic contacts with suffering people, His ready accommodation to the ideas of the mentally disordered, His ways of eliciting the confidence of His patients, all point in the same direction.

“ If we regard faith simply as a psychical process or mental attitude, history and experience alike testify that it has healing virtue. . . . It is not so much the quality as the strength of faith that is of vital moment so far as the removal of a given disorder is concerned. . . . How is it that faith as a mere mental state has this power? Modern physiology gives the answer. It tells us that the processes of the body are controlled by the two great nerve systems, the cerebro-spinal and the sympathetic. We perform our conscious acts through the mechanism of the brain ; but the involuntary physical processes, such as the circulation of the blood, the complicated process of turning the food we consume into bone and flesh, in a word, all the vital chemistries of the body, are carried on by means of the sympathetic nerve system. Now it is on this system that the emotions have most direct effect. Fear disorganizes and paralyzes the delicate machinery of the nervous organism, and as a result its various functional activities are disturbed or inhibited. On the other hand faith stimulates and harmonizes them.”  
(McComb, *Religion and Medicine*, pp. 293, 294.)

Some at least of the Gospel miracles can be understood on such a principle. The scientist who approaches their records from this standpoint observes that mind has a much greater influence over matter than was once recognized, and that this is markedly true of matter organized so completely as it is in the human body. He goes further and says that the power of suggestion exercised by one mind over another (and thereby over the body that the latter influences) is very considerable and at



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times produces far-reaching results. To mental condition he adds emotional state as a very important factor in the regulation of health and disease. Applying this to the Gospel stories he does not now say they did not happen, but that they are not miracles.

But we must not imagine we have explained an extraordinary event when we have discovered something having a resemblance to it in our own experience, we must remember that we are availing ourselves of the resources and theories of twentieth-century medicine and its explorations of human psychology to account for cures wrought with the certainty of perfect understanding centuries before the department of psychotherapy was recognized or any of its basal principles formulated. As Bishop Headlam says,

“There was a power and authority about our Lord’s actions which was unparalleled then as it is unparalleled now. He exercised a spiritual authority that was unique. . . . The miracles of our Lord, even the miracles of healing, really present something which, if they happened in any way as is recorded, are different from any phenomena which are within ordinary human experience.” (*The Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ*, pp. 188, 194.)

We have, in effect, only transferred the term “miracle” from the deed to the Doer.

These deeds were normal to Jesus: they were part of the way in which He expressed Himself; an inevitable outcome of His personality, irrepressible acts of help and love. He could not stand indifferent or impotent in face of sorrow, or need, or suffering. More than once we have found that His activities

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were aptly summed up in the phrase "He went about doing good"; we must add that His conception of doing good simply does not recognize the compartments in which we are prone to classify and arrange beneficences. He passes directly and simply from one department to another and with no apparent consciousness of transition. Is the paralytic burdened with a sense of sin? Jesus forgives it. Is he inert and helpless? Jesus speaks power to the atrophied nerves and muscles with a word. Is the multitude distraught and lacking a consciousness of right direction? He teaches it. Is it hungry? He satisfies its body-need. Is a friend's heart bereaved and desolate? He comforts it, even though to do this involves calling back the beloved one who has passed on. Are people ignorant and hopeless? He spends Himself in a divine ingenuity of teaching methods. And it is all one to Him. How essentially this was our Lord's own view may be inferred from the reply sent to John the Baptist; it recites sundry miracles, not as miracles but as acts of love, and adds, "the poor have the Gospel preached unto them" (Matt. 11. 5), as finally conclusive that He is the Coming One.

Jesus rarely laid much stress on miracles, though on occasion He did appeal to them, as in the evidence for the Baptist, or, again, in the controversy about forgiveness of sins (Mk. 2. 9, 10), or in the last discourse, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake" (Jn. 14. 11). He came not as a worker of miracles but as a teacher who sought to communicate Himself to His scholars and so to reveal to



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them the Father. And the miracles were an essential part of this teaching, "the translation of His gospel into life," as Headlam says (*op. cit.*, p. 193).

John has used one of his Master's words and called these acts "signs." They are the signs of His character as well as of His power, they declare His nature as truly as His mission. He sought to reveal to man the only true God and gave Himself to do this; and that revelation of the love of God was the motive of His every act. Note His word to the Gerasene madman, "Tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and how he had mercy on thee" (Mk. 5. 20), or His argument with certain of His critics, "If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Lk. 11. 20). He spoke of Himself as simply the instrument by which the love of God was healing, cleansing, or restoring men. The salvation which Jesus taught was the concern of a love so amazing that nothing was too small for its solicitude (cf. Matt. 10. 29-31): it was concerned with men's bodies as well as their souls, and bodily well-being was one result of a right spiritual attitude—"thy faith hath made thee whole." For the accomplishment of that salvation, for body as for soul, He required and continually sought to elicit man's faith in God, either directly or through Himself. Faith was the only condition He asked. With a restraint we can scarcely understand He made no reference to any return of loyalty, scarcely ever hinted at the desirability of a further "spiritual" blessing that might be sought and obtained when men came to Him for the removal of physical

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maladies. He was content to do the good they desired and leave His deed to produce its fruit. He never spoke of His deeds as "wonders" or "miracles" save in one deprecatory reference (Jn. 4. 48), but as "signs," "powers," or "works"; and all these terms He used of His disciples' activities as well as of His own. To Him they were evidences of the love of God; and this beneficence was so primary a purpose of the act that at times it anticipated the faith required (cf. Mk. 3. 1; Lk. 7. 11; Jn. 5. 2).

The contemporary effect of our Lord's acts supports this interpretation of their purpose. The folk who saw in them evidence of sympathy and love and not merely of power were drawn to Christ by His deeds; others, who did not appreciate either His character or His claims saw no goodness evidenced by them, but considered that He was in league with the devil who had artfully given Him power over lesser devils (cf. Lk. 11. 15). It is because "the heart has reasons of its own which the reason does not know" that things "hidden from the wise and prudent" are "revealed unto babes."

Perhaps these conclusions seem more obviously applicable to the healing ministry of our Lord than to the "nature" miracles: this is a purely artificial distinction. Our explanations have not enabled us to dispense with the idea of miracle; they have only enabled us to recognize that Christ in action established that supremacy of the spiritual forces over the merely material which He so insistently proclaimed. The distinction of spirit and matter is a purely abstract affair; in practice we find



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continually that such a divorce is impossible. Scientifically speaking, we only know "spirit" in connection with some material embodiment or means of expression; from a philosophic point of view we only know "matter" through our consciousness, which is spiritual. Unless we are on our guard we find ourselves constantly, though quite irrationally, assuming that this fundamental divorce exists. See, for example, how some will maintain that, from its very nature, true prayer can only be concerned with spiritual and not with material things.

The healings are, ultimately, quite as remarkable as any other incidents. "Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind" (Jn. 9. 32), represents the position very fairly. The "nature" miracles, feeding the multitudes, walking on the water, stilling the storm, which fifty years ago were roundly declared to be impossible because of the uniformity of natural law, are really only a further stage of that emancipation of man foreseen by the Psalmist who wrote: "Thou hast put all things under his feet." The philosophic view of the universe which made such a declaration of impossibility appear logical to Victorian minds has now been pretty generally abandoned; men are coming to see that it is a universe absolutely inter-related and interwoven, with no separation of its activities into water-tight compartments. It was long ago observed that the careful nurture and hygiene of an ideal home might be made of no avail because the dainty robe of one of its inmates had been wrought by the fingers of a dying seamstress in a sweater's den a hundred miles

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away; later, we have learnt that a false doctrine of might, unemotionally expounded in a professor's classroom, can cause sorrow and heartbreak in homes scattered the world over where the teacher has never been heard of, where his lectures would appear the merest jargon. The scientist tells us that these are not remarkable coincidences, but merely obvious illustrations, drawn from medicine and philosophy, of the fact that our universe is one vast series of inter-relations in which reactions beyond the wildest fancies of former days can confidently be counted upon, so that, for example, a few mysterious taps on an instrument in New York may cause uproar and death ten thousand miles away within twenty-four hours. Science has not confirmed the theory of a self-contained, material universe whose laws and principles can be formulated without reference to the "vague possibilities of a spiritual universe"; psychology and biology as they advance recognize the importance of mental states and activities for bodily conditions, report continuous indications of an intelligent guidance behind the physical order, and suggest the possibility of an ultimate hypothesis which will give a spiritual interpretation to the universe.

The teaching of Jesus, whether by word or deed, makes one demand upon His scholars. As He believes in men and their possibilities and is ready, to the uttermost, to love them into what He knows men can become, so He requires an answering faith from those He would enrich and bless. This is not a strange faculty man is expected to produce in some mysterious fashion out of himself: it is a spiritual



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faculty implanted in all made in the divine image and likeness and, like other faculties, may be developed by use or atrophied by neglect. The demand does not mean that He sought to win men's assent to truth by the miraculous happenings narrated in the Gospels, but rather that He wanted men to recognize that they must enact in their own hearts and lives the actual experience of love, must hear His "Follow me" as He goes about doing good by exhibiting the divine resources as immediately available for every human need, must live by faith, as He did. It is the immediate response of a son to a father, the witness of the inner bond of relationship to Him who, as our Father, has given and goes on giving to His children the vigour of His own spirit's life. It is a simple, trustful response to His will, given because men are convinced that that will is love. It is not a new "something" thrust into the human soul from the outside; rather, it is the true self coming to its own.

"Our faith cometh of the natural love of the soul and of the clear light of our own reason and of the stedfast mind which we have of God in our own first making." (Julian of Norwich.)

Religion is recognition of God, and it is only when men rise above the alternations of hope and fear to real faith that they live religiously. So Paul describes faith as something which works by love; something, that is, which makes God's love the basal truth of the universe. It is the soul's "venture before victory." The mind's attitude is, essentially, *credo ut intelligam*: we do not say "By faith Newton

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discovered the law of gravity"; we say that he formed a theory as the result of observation and proceeded to test it throughout the universe he knew. But that is really saying that he went out in the faith of his hypothesis, and that by such a faith intellectual progress was made possible. Professor Ward has pointed out that this instinct of venture—and venture is of the essence of faith—is implicit in all evolution; "reptiles would not have modified into birds if they had waited till they could fly."

Faith is this same reasonable venture in the realm of the spirit, which includes the lesser realms of intellect and matter. The will to believe is not an arbitrary discipline imposed on man by religion; it is the essential condition of progress.

The miracles reveal our Lord as the "Way" to faith. In them faith is set over against the disabling things, against fear and anxiety, sickness and sin, sorrow and death, as the enabling faculty of the soul. The man with the withered hand, the woman with the issue, the ten lepers, exhibit faith's victory over sickness; the Syro-Phenician, the father of the epileptic, the storm-tossed disciples, the centurion, learn its power to dispel anxiety and fear; Jairus, the widow of Nain, Martha and Mary witness its victory over sorrow and death. In the light cast by His mighty works we understand the exultation of Paul when he wrote, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"; and why John said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."



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C. G. Montefiore says of Jesus' doctrine of faith :

"How large and simple and fresh it is, how childlike, how buoyant, how profound. It is quite untechnical; it is not opposed to works; we might almost call it trust instead of faith—unbounded trust in the constant goodness of God."  
(*The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 104.)

This is the faith Jesus sought by all His words and works to elicit and encourage.

Such faith, if one may so express it, "releases" the love of God and renders it immediately available. It is a clumsy way of putting it, perhaps, but it does seem as if, to the mind of our Lord, human faith furnishes the medium in which that Love can function. Miracles are its consequence, not its cause; they are the "signs *following* them that believe" (Mk. 16. 17). They are the results of that life which came into the world with Jesus Christ.

It is sometimes assumed that the purpose of miracles was to produce belief. This is not the assumption of the evangelists: John says of the signs he records that they

"are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (Jn. 20. 31).

That is to say, he preserved a record of certain selected historical happenings that the life-giving quality of the personality of Jesus might be recognized by others who were not present at those happenings and that they might share in the spiritual enrichment which His Person communicates. As proofs of Divinity they would be precarious indeed: it

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would not even necessarily prove a divine commission if a man walked on water or caused a blind man to see. But if such deeds reveal the character and purpose of God, if our Lord's humanity is the perfection of what man is, as the ancient creeds assert, then they do show what man may be and do; this Jesus Himself emphasized: "the works that I do shall ye do also."

The Incarnation was the

"elevation of human nature to a new level, which every man may ultimately reach; but only through such participation in the life of the Incarnate One as shall enable him to say with St. Paul, 'I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me.'" (*Illingworth, Gospel Miracles*, p. 56.)

The New Testament account of the incarnate life is largely an account of "wonders," "signs," or "mighty works." We do not need to read into the terms more than they meant to the age which used them; it is well to remember that these events did not astonish the people of that time to the point of denial of their genuineness, as possibly they would certain types of mind to-day. In that day all strange phenomena were manifestations of the power of demons or of the finger of God—of "supernatural" power, if such a term may be used without misunderstanding, for they drew no distinction such as ours between "natural" and "supernatural" because there was no idea that the laws of nature, as we speak of them, existed. They were extraordinary acts exhibiting the power and character of the person who performed them. Jesus was to the primitive witnesses a supreme revelation of God, as Love and Lord; His deeds



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were acts of beneficence to men, of authority over a universe which was of God's own making, and not a system of law He could not transcend; they were an inevitable result of the Word made flesh and tabernacling among men, and men's view of them was conditioned by their view of Jesus—their view of God.

“ ‘What think ye of Christ,’ friend? when all’s done and said.  
You like this Christianity or not?  
It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
Has it your vote to be so if it can?  
Trust you an instinct silenced long ago  
That will break silence and enjoin you love  
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,  
And all in vain, with bidding you despise?  
If you desire faith—then you’ve faith enough.  
What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves? ”

R. Browning, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*.